

# NEWSLETTER OF THE AILA SCIENTIFIC COMMISSION ON LEARNER AUTONOMY

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/div1/ailasc/news2001.html>

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March 2001

Issue # 7

## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the 2001 newsletter of the AILA Scientific Commission (SC) on Learner Autonomy. Please consult the guide to the contents below, to help you navigate your way around the newsletter:

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## 1 REVIEW OF 2000- 2001 ACTIVITIES

Sara Cotterall, Leni Dam, William Savage, Anita Wenden

### Membership

We currently have 276 members. Our membership includes language learners, teachers and researchers - some famous, and some infamous. You can read about some of our most recent members in Section 5 of the newsletter - Contributions from SC Members. If you would like to introduce yourself to other members, and have missed out on contributing to the 2001 newsletter, why not submit something to AUTO-L (see below)?

### SC Website

The SC website has been in existence since November 2000 and proves useful as a first point of reference for new members interested in finding contacts in the field. However AILA have expressed a desire in the future to establish SC websites within the existing AILA website. This would have the advantage of handing over to AILA staff responsibility for website maintenance.

### Newsletter

Sara Cotterall continues to produce the newsletter once each year. The newsletter is now distributed electronically only. Members can read it on the website or download it from there.

### AILA News No 5

Issue #5 of the AILA News is now available in PDF format on the University of Sydney Language Centre website, off the professional menu at <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/langcent>. If you send a message to Richard Baldauf at <[richard.baldauf@language.usyd.edu.au](mailto:richard.baldauf@language.usyd.edu.au)> he can send you the newsletter as an attachment as a MS Word DOC or RTF attached version.

### AILA REVIEW No 15

This issue, edited by Leni Dam, and including contributions from participants in the AILA SC Symposium held at AILA 1999 in Tokyo, is due for publication in the northern hemisphere Spring 2001.

**AUTO-L - Electronic Discussion Forum (Anita L. Wenden)**

AUTO-L is an electronic discussion forum whose purpose is to promote dialogue and exchange among language teachers and researchers involved in the following subfields of language learning and teaching, learner autonomy, self-directed learning, learning strategies, learner development, learner independence, learner training and self-access.

The list has been in operation since the fall of 1996 and now totals 277 subscribers. AUTO -L is co-moderated by Anita Wenden and Leslie Dickinson. Technical support for the list is provided by the Kamrul Ahsan, Educational Technology, York College, City University of New York. Requests to be subscribed to the list or removed from it should be sent to Anita Wenden.

In order to promote dialogue and exchange among the members, the list moderators invite guest moderators, who provide background information and recent insights on topics related to the promoting of learner autonomy. Guest moderators and topics for the last year have been:

- 1 Richard Smith: Autonomy and Culture
- 2 Terry Lamb: Autonomy at School level
- 3 Lindsay Miller: Materials for self-access
- 4 Alex Ding: Autonomy and self-assessment
- 5 Carol Griffith: Autonomy and gender

We have also had a very successful e-roundtable on teacher education and autonomy moderated by:

- 1 David Crabbe
- 2 Irma Huttunen
- 3 Flavia Veira
- 4 Carol Hosenfeld

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our guest moderators and the participants in the roundtable for their contributions .

Finally, this is to remind you that the quality of the exchange on the list depends on the subscribers. It is intended as a conduit of information about research projects, materials and methodology, conferences and publications. You are, therefore, encouraged to share this information with list members directly by posting it on auto-l or, if you prefer, send it to either one of the list coordinators for posting.

In addition, if you have suggestions for future roundtable and/or colloquium discussions or for a guest coordinator series and if you would like to volunteer to participate please contact either of the moderators:

Anita L. Wenden <wldyc@cunyvm.cuny.edu>  
Leslie Dickinson <leslie.dickinson@NTLworld.com>

**LAPI - Learner Autonomy Project Inventory (Leni Dam)**

There have been no developments, as regards the LAPI - neither any new entries nor any inquiries. The SC might consider at its next business meeting in Singapore 2002 what to do about this. In the meantime ideas and/or suggestions for the up-keep of a database for research projects within the area of learner autonomy will be most welcome. If you have a good idea, please contact me at [dam@dpu.dk](mailto:dam@dpu.dk) (Leni Dam).

- 2 **THE 4<sup>TH</sup> SYMPOSIUM OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMISSION ON LEARNER AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING, 13<sup>TH</sup> WORLD CONGRESS OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS, SINGAPORE, 16-21 DECEMBER 2002**  
Report by Terry Lamb and William Savage

The time is fast approaching for you to think about your contributions to our triennial gathering at the AILA World Congress. The co-organisers of the Singapore Symposium, Terry Lamb and William Savage, have registered the Scientific Commission on Learner Autonomy's plans to hold a symposium and a meeting with the conference organisers in Singapore, and they now await further details from them.

As reported in last year's newsletter, William and Terry have identified two themes to carry on from the 1999 Tokyo symposium: the relationships between learner and teacher autonomy, and innovative research methods to enable us to explore these relationships. It is hoped that these themes will encourage a useful focus for the symposium, but that members will be able to approach them from a variety of angles. The methodological strand responds to the need to evaluate and develop our research methodologies as discussed in Tokyo.

William and Terry are also eager to widen members' participation in the development of these themes in the lead-up to and the aftermath of the symposium, and they have begun to explore possible ways of achieving this, including use of the AILA and the Scientific Commission's web-sites as well the AUTO-L discussion group. The hope is that the symposium will be able to build on discussions which have already taken place, thereby including a broader range of inputs than would otherwise be possible. Apart from encouraging greater interactivity and a deeper exploration of the issues, a further advantage is that those members unable to be present in Singapore can be involved both before and after the event.

At this stage in the preparations, it would be useful for Terry and William to have any suggestions as to how they might involve as many colleagues as possible and encourage them to contribute. Also, if you are thinking of submitting a paper either alone or with colleagues, it would be helpful for them to know as it can help in focusing the lead-up activities. Please do not feel that you have to submit something formally yet - outlines of ideas are welcome as well as information on any projects you are involved in that relate to these themes.

You can contact either Terry at [Terry.Lamb@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Terry.Lamb@nottingham.ac.uk) or William at [savage@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:savage@loxinfo.co.th). They are looking forward to hearing from you.

### **3 OTHER AUTONOMY-RELATED ACTIVITIES**

#### **The 7<sup>th</sup> Nordic Conference and workshop on Autonomous Language Learning.**

In September 2000, the 7<sup>th</sup> Nordic Conference on Learner Autonomy took place in Helsinki - organised by Felicity Kjisik, Joan Nordlund and Leena Karlsson. Participants in these Nordic conferences - a group of around 40 people who are all actively involved in the development of learner autonomy at different levels - were especially invited for this 3-day event. Some come from the Nordic countries and some from countries in Europe where the development of learner autonomy is at its beginning and needs support.

Since Copenhagen 1996, it has become a tradition to open the first day of the conference to the public with a number of invited plenary speakers. This year Chris Candlin, Irma Huttunen, Leni Dam and Lienhard Legenhausen, David Little, Rebecca Oxford and Turid Trebbi were invited. Unfortunately Chris Candlin and Rebecca Oxford had to cancel their participation at the last minute. Viljo Kohonen stepped in in their place.

The title of the plenaries was "Autonomy 2000: where are we now and where are we going?" A video of the talks can be obtained from Helsinki University. Contact Joan Nordlund [joan.nordlund@helsinki.fi](mailto:joan.nordlund@helsinki.fi)

During the following two days, participants presented short papers on 'The state of affairs' in their respective classrooms, teacher training colleges, universities, and in-service teacher training centres. The conference closed with a panel discussion and the planning of possible projects across borders. As usual the proceedings will be published - once the speakers have submitted their manuscripts! For copies, contact Felicity Kjisik, Helsinki University. [felicity.kjisik@helsinki.fi](mailto:felicity.kjisik@helsinki.fi)

#### **The establishment of a Polish Learner Autonomy SIG under IATEFL.**

As one of the results of the conference in Krakow, 1998, 'Focus on learning rather than teaching' organised by Leni Dam, a very active 'special interest group' on learner autonomy has been founded.

They have frequent meetings and an annual conference - this year in April. The initiator and the person in charge is David French, [david@mail.filus.edu.pl](mailto:david@mail.filus.edu.pl). More information can be obtained from: [www.iatefl.org.pl/sig/al/al1.html](http://www.iatefl.org.pl/sig/al/al1.html)

#### **4 FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES**

##### **Conference Listing - University of Sydney Language Centre**

In November 2000, Richard Baldauf of the Language Centre, University of Sydney announced that he and his colleagues had agreed to assume responsibility for maintaining the conference listing which Peter White (CLTR, UQ) maintained for 8 years. The address is as follows:  
<http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/Arts/departs/langcent/conframe.html>

##### **DEVELOPING AUTONOMY: 2nd CUE mini-conference, Shimizu Shizuoka, Japan, May 12-13, 2001**

The College and University Educators (CUE) special interest group (SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) reports that submissions for its mini-conference on the 12th-13th of May in Shimizu Shizuoka are now closed. However participants are invited to register online at:  
<http://www.wild-e.org/cue/conferences/autonomy.html>, or to or contact Eamon McCafferty at the following address: <eamon@gol.com>

##### **CULTURE, COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY, Hong Kong, May 29-31, 2001**

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong  
Final call for papers - deadline 2 March 2001. Find out about the conference from the website:  
<http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~lc2001>

##### **IT AND MULTIMEDIA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING 2001 (ITMELT 2001), June 1-2, 2001**

The conference, which will be held on 1st and 2nd June 2001, will be hosted by the English Language Centre of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong. The two plenary speakers are Prof. Amy Tsui (The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong) and Prof. Martha Pennington (University of Luton, UK). Further information can be found at <http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/conference>

##### **FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE AND DEVELOPMENT, September 5-7, 2001 Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 5-7 September, 2001**

The conference organisers have issued a Call for Papers. Papers should relate to the focus areas of the conference, the principal theme of which is "Defining the Role of Language in Development". Papers should be submitted electronically through the website. Please note the importance of adhering to the word limits in your abstracts, as the website format is not sympathetic to wild variations from the norm.

For further information, visit the website at: [www.idpcambodia.org/conference](http://www.idpcambodia.org/conference)

##### **SECOND INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND SOCIETY**

##### **University of Havana Faculty of Foreign Languages, December 17-21, 2001**

On the occasion of its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the School of Foreign Languages of the University of Havana announces the celebration of the second International Colloquium on Applied Linguistics and Society which will take place at the University of Havana from December 17-21, 2001.

Paper presenters should attach an abstract (250 words maximum) to their registration. The registration form should be sent before Sept. 1, 2001 to Alain Concepción García, Secretario Ejecutivo Comité Organizador, Facultad de Lenguas Extranjeras, Universidad de la Habana, 19 de Mayo No 14, Plaza, Ciudad de La Habana, 10600, Cuba. Tel: (537) 796132, 705094; Fax: (537) 335930; Email: [flex@flex.uh.cu](mailto:flex@flex.uh.cu)

**PAN-ASIAN CONFERENCE 3 in association with JAPAN ASSOCIATION FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING ANNUAL CONFERENCE, November 22-25, 2002, Kitakyushu, Japan**

Malcolm Swanson has alerted us to the call for presentation submissions for PAC3 at JALT2001, November 22-25, 2001 in Kitakyushu, Japan. All the information required by those who wish to submit an application is available at: <<http://jalt.org/jalt2001/submissions>>

This conference is a collaboration between the Japan Association for Language Teaching's annual conference and the third in the Pan-Asian Conference series (PAC1 was in Thailand in 1997, PAC2 in Korea last year). As well as the traditional range of presentations, the conference organisers are particularly hoping to attract submissions on collaborative research projects currently underway in the Asian and Pacific areas.

## **5 CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SC MEMBERS**

**Debbie Corder** <[deborah.corder@aut.ac.nz](mailto:deborah.corder@aut.ac.nz)> is a new SC member, based at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, where she teaches and does research in the Japanese language. Debbie submitted the following account of a recent research project she and a colleague from the Japanese Section of the School of Languages at Auckland University of Technology, Dr Grant Waller, conducted. Grant's involvement is on the content and technical side; Debbie's involvement is in content and research into autonomous learning.

### *The QT Kanji Project*

*An analysis of the relationship between CALL (computer assisted language learning) software and the development of autonomous language learning*

For the past few years, the Japanese section in the School of Languages at Auckland University of Technology has been looking at ways to meet the different learning needs of students and to facilitate autonomous learning. Kanji is one of the most difficult and time-consuming aspects of learning Japanese, so it was decided to focus on Kanji initially, and computer software was one area we looked into. Research has indicated that using computer software is effective in language learning, and promotes the development of autonomous learning. However, the material must be carefully integrated into the curriculum, and most commercial software cannot be adapted, lacks relevance and students lose interest, unless the curriculum is adapted to suit the software. In addition, there is little information on what CALL environments will encourage the development of autonomous learning and which type of learner will benefit.

In 1999 Grant Waller met Miss Komori, a lecturer and researcher at Chubu University, Japan, and she gave Grant a database (for Macintosh computers) of Kanji with video clips of stroke order and sound files for pronunciation. Using Miss Komori's database, we have produced software for the teaching and learning of Kanji, for both classroom teaching and self access. The advantage of the software is that it can be adapted to suit any programme of study at any level (secondary as well as tertiary). We have even adapted it for Chinese.

We began trialling the software in 2000 and to evaluate its effectiveness, both in terms of software design and usage, and the relationship with autonomous learning. As CALL does not operate in isolation, we are looking at the learning context and what the learner brings into the learning situation. It is a longitudinal study, involving tracking frequency and type of student use, questionnaires and interviews.

Initial results indicate that the students like the software very much and find it very helpful. However, in most cases it appears that because of their approach to learning, they have not been using the software effectively. In many cases, lack of motivation is apparent. It would seem that there is some evidence to support the view that students' lack of motivation in their approach to their studies is a contributing factor, and moreover that learners must already be autonomous if they are to gain the full potential of a CALL learning programme. We will continue with our research this year, looking particularly at motivation as a factor in autonomous learning.

**Alun Davies** <[davies@lilac.ocn.ne.jp](mailto:davies@lilac.ocn.ne.jp)> submitted the following brief profile for the newsletter: "After graduating from university with a degree in Russian and French, I switched track to TESOL and have

been teaching now in this field for some ten years. The last five years have been spent in Japan, my present home, where I work freelance as a provider of ESP courses to local companies. From early this year, however, I will be combining my present work with part-time university classes and I'm really looking forward to the challenge of working in two very different areas of TESOL. I'm in the final stages of my MA in TESOL dissertation (with the University of Edinburgh, UK) which deals with the topic of teacher-students' perceptions of teacher-made vs published ESP written input materials. My interest in learner autonomy is linked to my interest in materials design and I am interested in exploring ways to promote learner autonomy through teacher-made materials intended for general (as opposed to self-access) classroom use.†

**Debbie Dolan** <[debbied@comedu.canberra.edu.au](mailto:debbied@comedu.canberra.edu.au)> recently contributed this summary of her PhD project: üI am currently a PhD student with the University of Canberra, Australia. My research project aims at creating an pedagogically-based technology-enhanced environment that enables universities to offer simultaneous on and off-campus language programs without having to split resources. It is my opinion that whilst learner autonomy has been considered an ideal pedagogic framework with which to establish such environments, the pedagogy is often compromised, resulting in restrictive methods of teaching and learning. The project intends to make a complete study of learner autonomy, explore its role in present language programs and suggest ways in which it can be implemented into a technology-enhanced environment. I would be interested to hear from those of you who have completed related case studies. I can be contacted at the following email address <[debbied@comedu.canberra.edu.au](mailto:debbied@comedu.canberra.edu.au)>†

**Nicolaas Hart** <[hartnicolaas@netscape.net](mailto:hartnicolaas@netscape.net)> was born in the Netherlands and has been in Japan for ten years. He now works at Kwassui Women's College in Nagasaki, Japan, which is a four year college. He writes: üWe have a Japanese Department, an English Department, a Music Department, and a Human Relations Department. I am responsible for teaching English to all first and second year students (100+100). It is a very difficult task. To find out more, you can visit my website at: <http://sites.netscape.net/hartnicolaas/dejima>†. Nicolaas also contributed this summary of an article he wrote recently on a project in which he successfully used an Australian social science textbook with a group of his Japanese students.

#### *Using High School Social Science Texts*

There is a strong tradition in Japan to use published textbooks in college and university EFL communication courses. For this reason, ESL texts more suitable for use in an English language context are used, though the interactive language taught is not relevant for Japan where such personal English is seldom if ever used outside the classroom.

The alternative approach of teachers gathering resource material related to *issues* of a less personal nature and related to the student's academic interests and social circumstances and designing a course around them is time-consuming and difficult.

A new (?) approach is to use such texts as Getlins, I (Ed) (1994-6). *New Perspectives in Social Education* (Vols. 1-4). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Because these Junior High School social science texts are primarily a set of *focus questions* with *supporting questions*, students (1) choose their own topics and generate the topic language from their own experience, (2) deal with concepts and issues of broad social significance, and, (3) engage in interactive language about their real world. Not only is the language immediately meaningful, it also provides a basis for whole-life learning.

A recent study, "Student Autonomy and Authentic Materials", to be published soon, describes the successful use of *Volume 1* in a women's college in western Japan. Six groups in each of three classes were engaged in preparing posters and written statements about each focus-question using different supporting-questions. Their authentic resources came from their own experiences and the internet, and the end product was a series of booklets on each focus-question topic. The main benefit, however, was the development of student autonomy in the context of group learning. Further details of the study are available from <[hartnicolaas@netscape.net](mailto:hartnicolaas@netscape.net)>.

**Luciano Mariani** <[luciano.mariani@iol.it](mailto:luciano.mariani@iol.it)> writes in from Italy: üLast year I wrote a book (in Italian) called "Portfolio" (Zanichelli Editore, Bologna, 2000; Students' Book ISBN 88-08-09093-0; Teachers' Guide ISBN 88-08-03427-5) which is a collection of materials and activities to help students investigate "what

they learn and how they learn". The materials aim at helping both students and teachers investigate learning styles, beliefs, attitudes, motivations and learning strategies across the curriculum, and at helping them to transfer this increased awareness to the specific subject-related curricula. The cross-curricular perspective was chosen because, although L2 teachers in Italy are considerably well aware of autonomy-related issues, their colleagues at school often are not, thus jeopardizing any attempt at creating a whole-school policy on learner autonomy. The Students' Book is accompanied by a Teacher's Guide, which provides extensive teacher support in investigating what for many are rather unfamiliar areas. Sample activities and materials from "Portfolio" are available on my web site ([http://utenti.tripod.it/learning\\_paths](http://utenti.tripod.it/learning_paths)), while papers explaining the rationale and background to this project were published in Volume XXIX, 2000 of "Lingua e Nuova Didattica". †

**Christine Nicolaidis <[nicolai@atlas.ucpel.tche.br](mailto:nicolai@atlas.ucpel.tche.br)> and Vera Fernandes**

<[vera@atlas.ucpel.tche.br](mailto:vera@atlas.ucpel.tche.br)>, are two new members from Brazil. They work at the Universidade Católica de Pelotas and recently submitted this report of a research project on learner autonomy.

*A Brief History of a Self-Access Center in Brazil: CAAL*

In the first semester of 1998, the *Centro de Aprendizagem Autônoma de Línguas Estrangeiras (CAALE)* was inaugurated for first semester students of the Language Course of the Catholic University of Pelotas. The Center had as a main objective to expose students to a large quantity of quality input so that they could develop their linguistic competence in English through autonomous learning. It started with the help of two English teacher researchers and a tutor. Later on, due to the MERCOSUL (a free trade market agreement among Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Chile), the Spanish language was introduced to CAALE and a new teacher and tutor were added to the Center staff.

In this phase, the researchers faced their first problems. These concerned the relationship among the tutors, who showed some resistance to working as a team, sharing tasks and taking the initiative when dealing with the challenges involved in developing learners' autonomy. Despite these problems, the SAC (self-access center) researchers began conducting interviews with the users in order to define the profile of the students who were attending. Proficiency tests were also administered in the target language to evaluate the students' previous knowledge. In the meantime, activities undertaken by the students in the SAC were monitored by the tutors, who wrote down their impressions of the students' behaviour during their study sessions in CAALE, and discussed these in meetings with the researchers. These impressions resulted in a group of papers that were presented by the tutors in conferences and workshops for students beginning their research careers.

In the first semester of 1999, CAALE entered a new phase. After having established the physical structure of the SAC and solved some of the obstacles concerning its functioning, the researchers and tutors were able to dedicate more time to trying to understand learner autonomy while also developing the students' linguistic competence in the target language. The weekly meetings began to focus on the literature on learner autonomy, and the tutors were encouraged to consider the objectives of the project in greater detail in an attempt to understand the factors that influence the construction of learner autonomy.

Two strategies were implemented to motivate students to visit the SAC more frequently. The first was to offer traditional English and Spanish classes in CAALE on different days of the week, taught either by teachers from the University or by invited guests. This traditional way of learning attracted students who had never been to the SAC before and gave them the chance to review some of their own beliefs about learning. The second strategy involved registering activities completed in CAALE as an additional grade for the target language class students were attending.

In the second semester of 1999, a decrease in the frequency of student visits to CAALE was observed. This fact was probably associated with the lack of "attractions" in the SAC, since the extra classes were no longer offered and students' activities were no longer considered part of the evaluation of their course in English or Spanish. It was also considered necessary to introduce materials in the mother tongue to the SAC. After receiving approval from the institution, materials in Portuguese were added, and as a consequence the Center was renamed CAAL – *Centro de Aprendizagem Autônoma de Línguas*.

In the first semester of 2000 another strategy was adopted. The researchers offered the other teachers a workshop in which they introduced the materials available in the Center as a potential complement to

their classroom teaching. This opportunity helped teachers to realize that the SAC might assist them in their teaching, rather than give them “extra” work to prepare and correct. Even though this new strategy stimulated teachers to incorporate the idea of developing learner autonomy by using CAAL, it was observed that only 32% of the students enrolled in the Language Course were going to the SAC to develop their knowledge in terms of language.

Accordingly, a new methodology was implemented by the researchers from August 2000 onwards. In the curriculum of the Language Course, the subjects of English II and Spanish II are offered in 85 hours of class distributed in 17 sessions of 5 hours each. It was decided that, in addition to these hours, students would be asked to complete 20 hours of extra activities in CAAL. This independent work is done by students in basic level “packages” divided into grammar, listening, video, reading tasks and multimedia tasks. All these materials were previously tested and it was determined that students should take about two hours to complete each package. Students are required to hand in these completed packages by assigned dates; the material contributes to the evaluation of their English and Spanish class. In the beginning of the semester, students also receive the timetable of CAAL so that they can choose their preferred time to complete their activities. The English and Spanish teachers get together with researchers and tutors once a month to evaluate the process. Students who are taking part in this project also have monthly counselling meetings with the researchers; usually students come in groups but individual counselling is also available. During these sessions, learners have the chance to use their voices to express attitudes and beliefs concerning the development of autonomy in the learning of the target language.

Although this may seem, at first glance, like a very guided methodology where not much autonomy is exercised by the learner in addition to CAAL, choosing when to go and correcting his/her own work - we believe this is the first step towards autonomous learning. This seems to be true at least in our cultural context, where teachers and students bring with them strong beliefs about learning, such as that the teacher is responsible for deciding when, how, what and how much should be learned. In spite of the fact that this methodology was implemented just a couple of months ago, some data already reveal resistance from learners to taking responsibility for their own learning. The tutors who work in CAAL to orient learners to their activities submit weekly reports about students’ behaviour in the SAC. The following student belief about the way his teacher reacted towards his work done in the SAC was included in one of these reports. The student stated:

“she didn’t even look carefully to these packages, she only checked if they were complete and that was it”.<sup>1</sup>

This statement clearly shows that the student, despite being an adult and attending college, needs stimulating feedback from the teacher. He needs to be sure that he is on the right track, and that his effort was not in vain and was recognized by the teacher. Just going to CAAL to acquire more linguistic competence through autonomous learning does not seem to be enough.

Some other data, also taken from the weekly report of a tutor, show students’ lack of motivation to develop linguistic knowledge:

“... about the packages, I observed this week that students that complete the packages before their colleagues, pass on the answer sheets to the others, who only get here and copy the answers, without even making an effort to learn something new with the colleague.”

Students who behave in this way seem to doubt that the work done in CAAL can contribute to the development of their competence in the target language. Or even worse, they might believe that it is not their responsibility to be concerned about being more competent.

Until now, only one meeting to evaluate the new methodology has taken place among the English and Spanish teachers, tutors and researchers. Nevertheless, we have already observed one of the teachers considering her own commitment to the introduction of learner autonomy in her praxis. At the meeting, when the researchers explained the new proposal, the teacher accepted the idea with enthusiasm. However, one of her first concerns was what “her responsibility” in the process would be. She wondered if her role would include explaining the process to her students, since she feared some dissatisfaction from her students with regard to the additional work the new methodology would involve. The teacher expressed immediate relief when she was told that it was the researchers’ role to do that. This anecdote

seems to illustrate some contradiction between the teacher's spoken belief and her attitude when dealing with the introduction of autonomy in her classroom.

#### *Future perspectives and some final considerations*

It is important to remember that this new methodology in the project is still in a beginning stage. The limited data available have only confirmed our previous hypotheses that teachers' and students' beliefs tend towards resistance to the pursuit of autonomy. However, we believe that by helping learners to explore their learning styles and analyse the strategies that they use, we can help them achieve better results in terms of autonomy in the future.

In the first semester of 2001, when we expect that our learners will have realized some of the positive results of their efforts in terms of linguistic competence, and be able to make some of their own choices according to their preferences, needs and learning style, we will provide them with the opportunity to exercise some more autonomy. At that stage the learners will still be required to visit CAAL, but with more freedom, for example being able to choose their own tasks. This will occur successively until they become totally or partially responsible for their own learning.

Finally, we are aware of the amount of work that has been done all over the world towards the development of learner autonomy. As with many other aspects of human nature, this is not something with a right or unique path which can be followed. It is our belief, as researchers in this area, that in order to understand how autonomy is developed, it is necessary first to find out how students and teachers conceive learning, and then try to help them achieve autonomy. From our point of view this can only be done through reflection on our own cultural context.

Christine and Vera write: "We would welcome feedback from any readers. We can be contacted at the e-mail address at the top of this report." †

**Hayo Reinders** has recently started work on a project at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He writes: "The University of Auckland is currently setting up an English Language Self Access Centre for its Non-English Speaking Background students. As part of this self access centre we are developing an Electronic Learning Environment (ELO) to provide students with varying degrees of support. Students will also have access to the ELO through the internet. Developing learner autonomy is an explicit goal of the facilities, and the computer system will assist learners in making needs analyses, setting goals and monitoring progress. For more information contact Hayo Reinders, <h.reinders@auckland.ac.nz> or visit [www.auckland.ac.nz/elsac](http://www.auckland.ac.nz/elsac) (from March 2001)." †

**Keiko Sakui**, <[ksakui@hotmail.com](mailto:ksakui@hotmail.com)> is another recent SC member. She submitted the following report of the PhD study she is currently undertaking at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

#### *An investigation of Japanese teachers' beliefs*

My original interest in beliefs started as an investigation of Japanese learners' beliefs using a questionnaire (Sakui & Gaies, 1999). This study was illuminating in understanding the general picture of what Japanese university students, as a collective group, believe about Japanese English education. However, after the completion of the study, I felt that even though the study was informative, I sensed a more complex picture of language teachers and learners' beliefs could be explored.

Based on this afterthought, I've begun to carry out a study on teachers, from a social constructivist view using qualitative research methodologies. Our questionnaire study was based on a positivist paradigm, which assumes that we are seeking singular, stable "truth". In contrast, my current research on teachers' cognition takes a position that all knowledge and beliefs these teachers bring to their classrooms are socially constructed and negotiated. That is, teachers' knowledge and beliefs are not static but dynamic, historical, and cultural in nature.

Furthermore, unlike a positivist paradigm, the constructivist position does not assume the effectiveness and success of context-free methods and strategies (Richardson, 1996). Rather, it all depends on teachers' prior beliefs and perceptions, various contextual factors and the interaction between them. The ultimate purpose of my study is to gain a deeper understanding of a complex web of teacher beliefs and knowledge, and their cultural practices in their demanding teaching environments.

The participants in this study are public school teachers in a Japanese metropolitan area, whose experiences vary from 10 to 25 years of teaching. Multiple sources of qualitative data over one academic year will be collected including in-depth interviews, classroom observations (participant-observant), teaching materials and various archives on related issues. The data will be analyzed applying grounded theory methodology to identify the recurring and salient themes emerging from the data.

My tentative research questions on teacher cognition are

- 1 What are the teachers' epistemologies in learning a language? How do they believe students learn the language best?
- 2 What cultural meanings do Japanese teachers of English appropriate when incorporating Western-derived communicative teaching into their practice? What are the constraints and opportunities to incorporate their beliefs into practice? How and to what extent do teachers incorporate communicative teaching while preparing learners for form based entrance examinations?
- 3 What do teachers believe important to maintain good classroom management? What is their perception of their self-efficacy on this issue? What constructions of power exist among participants (both teachers and students) in negotiating classroom management?
- 4 What do teachers report in their processes of developing their professional knowledge, identity and expertise?

The preliminary findings of interview data gathered from 12 teachers include that teachers recognize they are expected to provide two types of instruction: English for examinations and English for communication. Some teachers accept the dichotomy but others do not like a dichotomous view of their teaching practice and try to connect the two using various goals and personal theories. Further analysis revealed that while teachers have explicit expectations of what students have to perform to succeed for English examinations (e.g. memorization, sentence level translation, grammatical sentence manipulations), many teachers I interviewed seem to have difficulties in describing what communicative teaching is, especially pertaining to students' performance and operations. Teachers often report they use videos, provide contexts to their teaching, and work with native speaking teachers to enhance learners' communicative ability, however, they could not articulate what and how students are expected to perform with these mediational tools.

Furthermore, the topic of classroom management is ripe in the cultural context of my investigation. Classroom management is becoming a serious social problem not only in language classes but also in all subjects in Japanese schools. All teachers I interviewed expressed concern and interest in this issue, and described learners' misbehaviors and verbal and physical violence in the classrooms. Teachers sometimes select quiet seatwork so that they can control their classroom, but at the same time they are aware that this does not have instructional benefits for all the students in the class. This is consistent with Doyle's (1986) argument that teachers often find maintaining a fine balance between teaching content and classroom management challenging.

Another theme that emerged from the interview data is that teachers believe they hold the authority and power to manage the class and set rules. However, the interview data also revealed that teachers' power and students' power, both employing compliance and resistance, constantly negotiate a fine line of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors in the classroom.

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## 6 BOOK REVIEWS

**Sinclair, B. , I. McGrath and T. Lamb (eds.) 2000 *Learner Autonomy, Teacher Autonomy : Future Directions*. Harlow : Longman. In association with the British Council. (ISBN 0-582-42963-3, 137 pp, £14.95 sterling)**

Reviewed by Hayo Reinders, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

The past few years have seen a number of international conferences on learner autonomy. One of these was held in 1998 at the University of Nottingham. The eleven articles in this book give an overview of the issues covered by the participants in that conference. The collection is divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on the learner and aspects of autonomy in language learning. The second section focuses on teachers and their various roles in the promotion of learner autonomy.

Barbara Sinclair's opening article is of particular interest. She gives a useful survey of the current state of the field in which she identifies and discusses thirteen aspects of learner autonomy and attempts to set an agenda for future research. David Little argues in his article that since language learning is a social process, the development of learner independence is supported by learner interdependence. Collaborative learning provides opportunities for what Little calls 'distributed cognition' - a situation wherein learners support each other in their learning. Learner autonomy is, he claims, necessary for engaging in language use, independent of the teacher and the learning context. Do Coyle discusses inner-speech and private speech as supporting the process of learning to communicate and as a means for self-regulation. Coyle argues for alternative forms of interaction within the classroom, with a shift to contingent conversation and other forms of learner-initiated communication, that will enable them to make use of these forms of learning. Radha Ravindran describes an interesting programme offered by Temasek Polytechnic in Singapore which results in students being awarded a Certificate in Independent Language Learning. The paper describes the development and implementation of the programme. The first section is rounded off by Philip Hood, who considers obstacles to the development of learner autonomy posed by educational contexts, and by Leni Dam, who emphasises the importance of classrooms being *learning-centered*, rather than learner-centered. She argues that evaluation should be focused on processes rather than outcomes and should include more opportunities for self-assessment.

In section two of the book, Gail Ellis argues that teachers often underestimate the importance of metacognition for young learners and lists possible explanations for this as well as possible solutions. Richard Smith suggests that teachers cannot only benefit from reflection on their teaching, but also from engaging in language learning themselves, especially the language of the students they teach. Ian McGrath discusses teacher autonomy as control over one's professional development and freedom from control by others, both of which are tasks for teacher education. Phil Benson takes a more philosophical approach and discusses autonomy as a learner's right. He then discusses factors constraining autonomy and concludes that learner autonomy is largely dependent on how autonomous teachers are. Terry Lamb starts with a description of underachievement and disaffection in education in the UK for which he presents several explanations. He concludes by making a case for the development of a critical awareness in learners which will enable them to participate in power-sharing.

All in all, the articles in this book represent a range of different approaches to learner and teacher autonomy. This is both a strength and a weakness of the collection (as of most conference proceedings). However, in their own ways, the papers contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues involved and form a readable and valuable contribution to the field.

## **7 RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON LEARNER AUTONOMY**

Benson, Phil. 2000. *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. London: Longman. (ISBN: 0582-368 162. £14.99)

[Phil says of the book: "The book is published by Longman in a new series called Applied Linguistics in Action. It is intended to be an overview of the field of autonomy aimed at researchers and potential researchers. You can find more about the book at the Longman web site:

<http://www.booksites.net/benson>. The last chapter is list of web sites, email lists and other resources related to autonomy and you can download it for free from the Longman site.]

Cotterall, Sara. 2000. "Promoting learner autonomy through the curriculum: principles for designing language courses". *ELT Journal* 54, 2:109-117.

Hurd, Stella. 2000. "Distance language learners and learner support: beliefs, difficulties and use of strategies". *Links and Letters* 7.

Hurd, Stella. 2000. "Helping learners to help themselves: the role of metacognitive skills and strategies in independent learning". In *Convergence and diversification? Institution-wide language programmes*. London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT). ISBN1 9020310 56 3.

Little, David, Leni Dam and Jenny Timmer (eds.), *Focus on Learning rather than Teaching: why and how?* Papers from the IATEFL conference on learner independence, Krakow, 14-16 May 1998. CLCS, Trinity College Dublin. (2000)

Mariani, Luciano. 2000. *Portfolio*. Bologna: Zanichelli Editore.

Sinclair, Barbara., McGrath, Ian. and Lamb, Terry. (2000) *Learner Autonomy, Teacher Autonomy: Future Directions* London: Longman (ISBN: 0-582-42963-3).

Victori, Mia. (Ed.) (2000). *Autonomy in second language learning*. *Links and Letters*, 7. ISSN1133-7397.

Wagner, Johannes (ed.) "Pædagogik og IFring i fremmed- og andetsprog." Institute of Language and Communication, University of Southern Denmark, *Odense Working Papers in Language and Communication*. No. 22 January (2001). E-mail the following address to obtain a copy: <lfm@language.sdu.dk>

[Leni Dam says of this book: "Even though the title of this collection is in Danish, the contributions are in English. They include a paper by Dick Allwright entitled "Learning (and teaching) as well as you know how: why is it so very difficult?"; a paper by Leni Dam entitled "Bridging the gap between real life and the language classroom - principles, practices and outcomes"; a paper by Lienhard Legenhausen entitled "Linguistic outcomes of a learner-centred and meaning-focused classroom" ; and a paper by John Hayes entitled "A new model of the writing process".]