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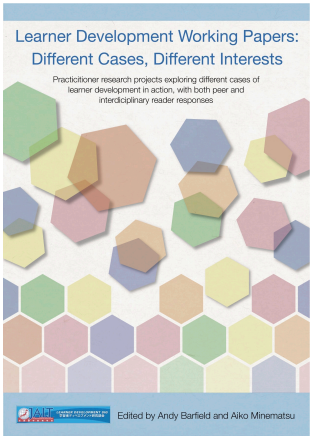

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Autonomy or Fauxtonomy: Co-constructing roles in a learner autonomy course

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Chapter Two

Autonomy or Fauxtonomy: Co-constructing roles in a learner autonomy course

Martin Mullen, Christopher Fitzgerald and Paul Crook, Meisei University, Japan, with Phil Benson, Macquarie University, Australia, and Michael Hennessy, University of Limerick, Ireland

Abstract

The ability to facilitate the development of independent learning and self-sufficiency among students has long been recognized as a hallmark of good pedagogy, and volumes of papers attest to the benefits of such an approach. In Confucian-heritage settings such as Japan, however, the goal of helping learners become autonomous is not always celebrated as much as elsewhere. In this chapter, the authors explain the challenges they faced in attempting to develop and implement a Learner Autonomy course at a university in Tokyo, Japan. These challenges included the difficulty of aligning the content of the course with the institution's more traditional evaluation criteria, and the necessity to overcome the teachers' own trepidation at taking on such challenges. The key issue faced by the teachers was reluctance on the part of the students to participate fully in the course, and the realization that, paradoxically, perhaps a heavily structured approach was best suited to facilitate the students' development of a capacity for autonomous learning. The chapter details the authors' attempts to resolve these challenges while still delivering a valid course for the learners.

要旨

学生達の自立学習や自律の促進は良質な教育の証であると長く認識されており、その取り組みの有効性は数々の研究により裏付けられている。しかし日本のように儒教の精神が根付いている国では学習者の自律を促進することは他国と比べ、必ずしも受容されるものではない。この章では筆者たちが都内の大学で自立学習の授業を開発、実践するにあたり直面した複数の課題について述べる。これらの課題とは、大学側が求める従来通りの成績評価基準に合わせて授業内容をいかに調整するか、教師がこの課題に直面するに当たっての不安をいかに取り除くかである。教師側が直面した主な問題とは第一に授業に積極的に参加することへ学生側の躊躇と、第ニには、逆説的ではあるが学生の自律学習の能力を引き出すためには、より体系的なアプローチをとったほうが良いのではないかと気が付いたことである。この章では教師側が学習者にとって効果的な授業を実践すると同時にこれらの課題に取り組んだ過程を記述する。

Key words

learner autonomy course, self-regulation, learner beliefs, scaffolding, motivation

自律学習授業、自主性、学習者ビリーフ、足場作り、モチベーション

Chapter Two

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Part One

Introduction

Maintaining an appropriate balance between the teacher and learner roles in the classroom is a universal concern, but a course aiming to foster learner autonomy in a Japanese context presents particular challenges for students and teachers. From our shared experiences of developing together a course in learner autonomy, we have come to realize that a key concern is our ability to identify the fundamental difference between fostering genuine learner autonomy and inadvertently promoting faux autonomy, or what we have come to term *fauxtonomy*.

By 'fauxtonomy' we refer to what could be described as a contradiction between our pedagogic beliefs and our pedagogic practices. Although we may feel that allowing our students to make more choices enhances their ability to learn autonomously, we may nevertheless often limit the options available to them so that their development is restricted in order to match our perceptions of what is most suitable for them as learners.

Central to this chapter is a discussion of the necessity for both us teachers and our students to reconsider our roles in the classroom and to be willing to embrace roles that are more aligned with the fostering of learner autonomy. Contextual factors (institutional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural) impact on the formation of our students' learner identities, and consequently influence the aims, design and implementation of a learner autonomy course that we teach at Meisei University in Tokyo. This chapter outlines the processes by which we and our students negotiate the co-construction of roles in this learning environment, against the background of the concerns outlined above, and investigates the answers which we have decided upon for the following questions. To what degree does the institutional environment in which the course takes place facilitate the fostering of autonomy among our students? How prepared are newly arrived teachers to conduct classes in a course promoting autonomy, and what role can experienced teachers play in helping these teachers become more familiar with the course? To what extent have our students' high school experiences familiarized our students with the learning role we want them to play in the course? These are some of the key questions that we explore in this paper.

The institutional environment

Along with other teachers in the Department of International Studies at Meisei University, we work together to teach a compulsory learner autonomy course conducted over the first two years of the Bachelor's degree course offered at Meisei University's International Studies Center. As all of the students are enrolled in English language classes, we use their language study as a foundation on which the discovery and use of resources and skills can be focused. However, we are careful to emphasize that the skills and processes can be applied to other aspects of their learning and their lives in general. Our weekly classes take place in a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) classroom and are un-streamed in terms of students' levels of language proficiency. Usually between 10 and 30 students take each class. The room offers access to online resources and facilitates the development of online profiles or e-portfolios, allowing greater sharing and peer-viewing of work produced or evaluated by students. However, the presence of computers with internet access can also result in a certain amount of student confusion as to the purpose of the class. It is not uncommon for our students to get distracted by the computers and initially view the class as a CALL class, as this is the only class that the students take in a CALL environment. Another important issue that we have found impacting on the design of the course is the necessity for students to be assessed. We must award grades in line with university regulations, although there are no institutional guidelines as to how we should assign them.

Teacher readiness for the course

Although the staff who teach this course at Meisei University are in agreement regarding the primary aim of the course, which is to facilitate the development of students as autonomous learners, there are a number of challenges that we need to overcome. Despite research arguing that short-term contracts for foreign teachers, as well as being unfair, are also 'academically detrimental' (Umakoshi, 1997, p. 262), teachers are generally employed by Meisei University for a maximum of three years, and they are often unfamiliar with the process of fostering student autonomy when they start. Consequently, for teachers trained as language instructors rather than learning advisors, there is often the need to undertake what can be an unexpected process of redefining their own roles as teachers. As language teachers, we have traditionally been expected to take on the role of authority figures who control the design and implementation of classroom practices. A new role centering on a gradual transfer of control over what happens in the class to our students involves a challenging process of adjustment where we initially struggled to find an appropriate balance. The short-term employment contract system is also problematic in that it leads to a significant lack of consistency in the cohesion of the course from one year to the next. There is a lack of experienced colleagues from whom new teachers can receive support; particularly as the framework of the course is regularly reviewed and revised in an effort to improve student outcomes. One final concern we have about teacher readiness is that teachers on short-term contracts may be unmotivated to attempt major innovations in the course, because their employment will come to an end before any significant changes can be implemented or any pedagogical outcomes become evident. These employment conditions, combined with our students' initial perceptions of the learning process, shape, both positively and negatively, the design, implementation and aims of our learner autonomy course.

Student readiness for the course

Cotterall (2000, p. 111) states that 'At the heart of learner autonomy lies the concept of choice,' while Benson (2011a) cautions that limiting the degree of student choice results in a

corresponding restriction on the development of their autonomy. Working together at Meisei, the three of us are aware of these dilemmas, yet typically students on the course are initially ill equipped to make informed decisions about the content of the course. Students at high schools in Japan have experienced an education system which, according to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), aims to 'cultivate richness of mind'. However, from our observations, it is apparent that our students' pre-university learning experiences have been predominantly teacher fronted, and that the students' opportunities to make decisions regarding the direction and management of their own learning have been extremely restricted, often resulting in a limited understanding of their own learning processes, and specifically, their perception of what can be expected of them in a classroom. This survey response from a first-year student is representative of the high-school experiences of many enrolled in the course:

We weren't meant to learn independently. The teacher decided for us. The teachers never asked us to think about how to learn. They will tell us how to do it.

Consequently, and perhaps more importantly than their previous lack of choice, it is rare that our students have even considered the positive aspects of taking greater control of their learning. Perceptions of their own classroom role as being that of a passive learner, and that of the teacher as being a 'knowledge-giver', as well as often being socio-culturally pre-determined within the modern Japanese context, have often become deeply ingrained and reinforced by many years of formal education. The students are often reluctant to embrace any roles beyond those they have experienced in previous learning environments without a measure of support from their teachers. In teaching this course, we try to avoid the pitfall highlighted by Riley (1986, p. 32), in which 'the majority of the relevant decisions are made for the learner, not by him', but we still feel that it is necessary for us to offer guidance and advice when taking into account our students' initial reticence. In our course, we have experimented with giving our students the opportunity to discover useful resources for themselves. However we have found this to be ineffective if attempted too early in the course, as the students are not yet capable of engaging effectively with this process of discovery. We have realised that having the students do this later in the course yields far better results, so we have consequently come to believe that an approach which initially limits their choices in the classroom is necessary, even though we may consider this an example of fauxtonomy. As the course teachers, we continually debate at what point designing and scaffolding classes cease to be beneficial in terms of helping our students' development, and become a barrier limiting their opportunities to be proactive as learners.

We agree that the primary objective of the course is to empower students to take a more active role in their own learning. This begins with our raising student awareness of the different kinds of learning styles and strategies which can be employed. We also explain that their role in the course will be to experiment with different methods, resources and strategies, and to evaluate reflectively the success of their experimentation with the materials in order to better understand what works best for them as learners. This leads us to the issue of needing to find an appropriate balance between scaffolding and student choice.

As teachers we frequently consider how to work more effectually in order to 'help learners make important decisions about their learning without making those decisions for them' (Benson, 2011b, p. 17). This includes, for example, consideration of the following: how much choice students should be presented with; how much scaffolding needs to be developed in order to help students reach a point where they are capable of making informed choices;

whether the initial period of necessary scaffolding impedes a sense of developing autonomy; and taking into account the un-streamed nature of the classes, whether the course can in some way allow for the fact that some learners will invariably become capable of making informed choices earlier than others.

These issues might emerge in the classroom when we offer our students a choice from a number of resources for a period of self-study. While we feel that we are inviting our students to take a meaningful role in their own management of this study period, we are also aware that their choices are limited to the resources selected by us, and that our students may continue to see us as the providers of resources and skills. By presenting resources in this way, can we legitimately claim that we are helping our students develop a capacity to make decisions regarding their own learning, or does the activity simply perpetuate our control over their learning?

Following Holec's (1980) suggested methodology for learner training, we believe our role as teachers in this process is to provide the guidance and resources which will allow the students to make more active and informed decisions regarding the management of their own learning through the discovery of the 'knowledge and the techniques which he needs as he tries to find the answers to the problems with which he is faced' (Holec, 1980, p. 42). Yet, that said, we are also continually faced with other challenges involving:

- Motivation: How can we help our students believe in and invest in the concept of the course, that is, make the commitment themselves to exploring how they can become more autonomous learners?

- Assessment: Considering the active roles that we are asking the students to take on, how can we develop a method of assessment in which they have meaningful involvement

- Effectiveness: How can we determine (or agree on how to determine) what effects the course is having on our students, and how successful the course is?

These are some of the other central issues that we plan to address later in this chapter.

Peer reader response from Phil Benson, Macquarie University, Australia

I have been asked to respond to what Martin, Christopher and Paul have written up to this point and I want to take advantage of the pause in proceedings to focus on the idea of fauxtonomy. The authors have defined fauxtonomy very clearly as a contradiction between pedagogical beliefs and practices that causes teachers to restrict students' autonomy to match their perceptions of what is best for them as learners, and I am eager to learn more about how this contradiction works itself out in the course they have described. Hints have, in fact, been dropped. The learner autonomy course is 'compulsory' and there are questions about 'the learning role we want them to play in the course'. The authors have noted that students may see the course as a CALL class, rather than as a learner autonomy class. They have also added a layer of complexity by suggesting that newly arrived teachers may not (yet?) be aligned with the goals of the course.

The reason I like the term 'fauxtonomy' is that it nudges in the direction of seeing these issues as part of a single issue: what we expect of university students and what we expect of ourselves in relation to learner autonomy. But before I express my own view on that, I want to note two earlier papers that the term fauxtonomy brings to mind.

The first is Crabbe's (1993) article which talks about 'minute-by-minute' classroom practice, whether it challenges or reinforces learners' expectations of their roles, and whether it models autonomous learning behavior and highlights choices within the curriculum (Crabbe, 1993, p. 444). Crabbe's point is that it is not enough to talk about autonomy; opportunities to develop autonomy must also be built into the teacher's enactment of the curriculum. Is it here at the level of minute-by-minute practice that fauxtonomy insidiously goes about its work?

The second is Breen and Mann's (1997) article which talks about students putting on 'the mask of autonomy'. Breen and Mann suggest that: 'If I ask [students] to manifest behaviours that they think I perceive as the exercise of autonomy, they will gradually discover what these behaviours are and will subsequently reveal them back to me' (Breen & Mann, 1997, p. 67). Is the 'mask of autonomy', perhaps, fauxtonomy seen from the student's point of view?

These papers were, incidentally, written a relatively long time ago and raise issues that have not really been pursued in depth. Is this because they are too problematic for the enterprise of fostering autonomy that we are all engaged in? Leaving this question for someone else to answer, I want to hand this chapter back to its authors with my own, tentative, view on the problems they raise.

The important question, I believe, lies somewhere above the level of classroom practice and concerns the role of autonomy in modern university education. This is, it seems, not only something that we, as individuals who 'believe in' autonomy, think is important, but also something that university education increasingly demands. The 'autonomy gap' between school and university may also be widening; schools limit students' autonomy to help them through university entrance examinations, while university education becomes more and more impersonal and complex from the students' point of view. In this context, autonomy presents a real problem to university students—it is more or less a matter of academic survival – just as fauxtonomy is a real problem for university teachers. Avoiding fauxtonomy, then, as I feel Martin, Christopher and Paul would agree, seems to be a matter of allowing students' genuinely felt needs and desires to emerge in coursework that involves choices that students experience as meaningful choices. To say this is one thing, of course; to make it work in the classroom is another. I am eager to read on…

Part Two

We would like to thank Phil Benson for providing us with some valuable feedback on the first part of our chapter. Some of his comments touched on issues that we intended to address in the remainder of the chapter, but his response has also given us new perspectives on other aspects of our course.

We were particularly interested in the idea that the 'mask of autonomy' could be considered fauxtonomy from the students' perspective. We have found that with students who are already motivated, the course provides the resources that they need to manage their studies more efficiently. However, we have also noticed that students who are not initially

motivated to learn English will not necessarily become motivated through their exposure to the resources we provide in the class. This is an unfortunate consequence of the course being compulsory for all students, as it means that the class includes students not yet ready to take on responsibility for their own learning. Among this latter category of students the mask of autonomy can be particularly prevalent, as they are likely simply to perform in a manner that they feel will meet our grading criteria. This may include the setting of admirable but clearly unrealistic learning goals, or the completion of written reflections in a perfunctory manner. Although Phil Benson suggested that a capacity for autonomous learning is a matter of academic survival, we believe that while our students may need to exhibit autonomous behaviour in order to excel academically, it is not essential for them to survive academically. However, we believe that the majority of our students are willing to engage in the course as long as we can justify the purpose of the course, provide relevant resources, and allow them a measure of freedom to discover and experiment with these resources. In this process, while we share Crabbe's concern regarding the impact of 'minute-by-minute' practice on our learners' perceptions of their roles, we are perhaps more concerned with 'bridging the gap between public classroom activities and private learning activity' (Crabbe, 1993, p. 443) by advising and encouraging our students to reflect upon and analyze the appropriateness of these resources to their individual learning needs and circumstances.

Motivating our students

In his response to Part One of this chapter, Phil Benson highlighted the importance of 'allowing students' genuinely felt needs and desires to emerge in coursework that involves choices that students experience as meaningful choices.' We try to facilitate this element of choice in a number of ways. We firstly tell the students that the class will not be a traditional teacher-fronted class. Knapper (2008) noted that traditional classroom practices, such as lectures, continue to be favored by both teachers and students alike, despite volumes of empirical evidence indicating that 'prevailing teaching practices in higher education do not encourage the sort of learning that contemporary society demands' (Knapper, 2008, p. 2). We explain to our students the different stages of the course, including exposure to resources, collaborative project work, and self-directed study. We emphasize to our students that the content of the course is designed to promote the kinds of skills, including critical thinking, reflective analysis, collaborative process, self-management and self-assessment, which hold significant currency as real-world values.

We legitimize and contextualize these claims by providing evidence of corporations in Japan seeking employees with these skills. We make our students aware, for example, of a meeting which took place in 2010 between the Keidanren, an organization which represents corporate industry, and MEXT, in which the Keidanren representatives outlined Japanese industry's dissatisfaction with the analytical thinking skills of graduates from even the most prestigious Japanese universities. Recently, we have also been able to highlight decisions by well-known Japanese companies, such as Uniqlo and Rakuten, to make English the 'working language of their offices' (Agence France-Presse, 2013). Evidence such as this helps to motivate the students by exemplifying the relevance and practical merits of the course from the perspective of employment prospects.

As Ushioda (2007, p. 15) has noted, learners will engage in self-regulated learning if there is a combination of the desire and ability to 'control strategic thinking processes'. As early as the first semester our students complete a digital language learning history, which serves to clarify their own understanding of their identities, needs and goals as learners. With this

heightened awareness, they are able to approach classroom activities more effectively. These activities include experimenting with a variety of language learning resources, such as graded readers, software packages and websites, while exploring language learning strategies to enhance their use of these resources. The students can also choose from and complete individual and collaborative projects which are designed to help them analyze and manage aspects of their learning more efficiently, such as time management and goal-setting. In addition, our students keep blogs in which they regularly reflect on their efforts and success in engaging with the different aspects of the course, and their impressions of how the various resources can most effectively be applied to their own learning.

Resources that we introduce to the students include websites such as Lang-8 (www.lang-8.com) and SharedTalk (www.sharedtalk.com). These sites allow our students to become part of a mutually beneficial online community of learners extending beyond their institutional communities; it also hopefully heightens their perceptions of the value of English as a tool for cross-cultural interaction. The time management project involves the students collaborating to develop a weekly study plan suitable for a fictitious student at Meisei University by selecting, either from those we make available or which they have discovered by themselves, resources and strategies which are appropriate to the interests, specific learning goals and needs of the student. The aim of this project is to improve the students' abilities to select appropriate resources and create an effective study timetable.

To build on their exposure to different resources and their practice with time management, for part of each semester we ask our students to set their own goals for the completion of an extended in-class study plan. This plan, which is designed, monitored and evaluated by the students themselves, gives us—and more importantly, our students—an opportunity to assess the degree to which they have integrated the resources and strategies they have been exposed to into their own learning management. In the first semester of their first year, this self-study period might be as short as three weeks, which brings us back to our central question regarding fauxtonomy: is it better for our students to have more choice which is less informed, or less choice which is more informed?

When helping our students improve their capacity to make informed choices, it is important that we do not limit their choices to the resources which we have introduced during the course. We feel it is crucial to allow them to engage in a process of discovery, as 'the learner should discover, with or without the help of other learners or teachers, the knowledge and techniques which he needs as he tries to find the answers to the problems with which he is faced' (Holec, 1980, p. 42). With this in mind, we have our students complete a project which helps them to develop their ability to discover relevant resources for themselves.

This project requires them to search independently, or at least with minimal guidance from us, for online resources that have not been mentioned in class, and which they feel could assist themselves or other students in their language studies. They are required to evaluate these resources critically in terms of their merits for language learning, to assess their chosen resources for both their positive and negative aspects, and, in presentations to the class, explain the validity of their chosen resource as a learning tool.

Integrating autonomy and assessment

Even though Meisei University requires us to provide grades for our students, we are free to arrive at these grades however we see fit; and considering the focus of the course, we are keen not to revert to a traditional teacher-fronted approach to evaluations. It is important

that assessment also be approached in keeping with the theme of the course. Accordingly, we employ an assessment approach in which the students themselves regularly reflect on and evaluate their performance over the course, and during a period of counseling with the teacher, negotiate a mutually acceptable grade. It is here that Breen and Mann's 'mask of autonomy' (1997, p. 67) again becomes a concern, as we must determine whether our students have genuinely embraced the concept of the course, or have simply behaved in a way they think will satisfy us. Furthermore, our students' lack of familiarity with this self-regulated approach can lead to difficulties, with some students being unable or unwilling to critically analyze their own progress. This occasionally results in students completing self-assessment, which can be so self-deprecating or otherwise unreliable that the negotiation process effectively becomes a situation where the teachers must take the lead in assigning final grades.

In the same way that we feel our students tend not to possess the ability to take full control of each lesson, we believe that guidance from us during the process of self-assessment helps the students to focus on the central reflective, collaborative, experiential, and goal-oriented elements of the course.

In the second part of this chapter, we have detailed how we motivate our students to engage with the concept of the course. This includes providing them with evidence of the real-world benefits of the study and time management skills we hope they will develop during the course, and also includes presenting our students with learning resources and projects which will help them with the development of these skills. There are, however, still a number of issues we are concerned about. Firstly, we are keen to investigate what steps we can take to improve our students' engagement with the course. Are there other aspects to motivation that we haven't considered in enough detail? What else could we be doing to highlight to our students the importance of developing the skills we want them to develop? Secondly, we are concerned about whether the amount of scaffolding we provide is appropriate for the class. Are we restricting their opportunities (and abilities) to make meaningful discoveries and choices regarding their own learning by maintaining a degree of control over the class?

To further respond to our work, we have invited Michael Hennessy, a lecturer in ULearning at the University of Limerick in Ireland, to be our interdisciplinary responder for this paper. From his position as an academic keen to ensure that the courses offered in universities equip students with the skills that meet the needs of the employment sector, we are looking forward to the insights that he can offer from a non-EFL perspective.

Interdisciplinary response from Michael Hennessy, University of Limerick, Ireland

At the outset I have to say I found the paper interesting. A good education is fundamentally instilling the ability to think for oneself in its recipients. Developing these skills in a student is not an easy or simple task. It is indeed fraught with the issues outlined in the paper. It's a challenge to every teacher and should be considered as a key learning outcome in every programme.

In the paper's introduction it was heartening to see that the authors also placed an emphasis on the institution's responsibility to promote autonomy in the learner. In an ideal world students will be working towards learning outcomes delivered through clearly communicated

course and lesson objectives. Summative and formative assessment of the learning outcomes would drive the content creation for the course. The content would be sourced by the student with the teacher acting as a facilitator in the learning process. This is a Freirian view of education[1] and opens up the debate on the desired outcomes of the teacher and the institution in the process. The authors fairly pointed out that these outcomes are an influence on their practice. Tutors want contracts renewed and institutions want student enrolments.

In my experience of integrating transferrable professional skills into course content it might be worth mentioning now that many students see the separation of the skills set out of the mainstream course content into a specific course as reinforcing the perception that the skill is not really important: if it was it would be emphasised in all courses. In this light the perception of the authors' course as a CALL course by its participants may not be such a bad thing.

As for making an autonomous learner, the concept of fauxtonomy acknowledges the power relationship that exists in all classrooms because there is an information differential between the teacher and students. Students will wear the mask of autonomy to satisfy the course requirements and give the tutor what they want. This I believe is evidenced by the question asked in lecture halls the world over, "Will there be a question on this in the exam?".

In my experience managing over 50 courses a year across eight programmes, the design of assessments is a major issue in creating autonomous learning. Most assessments are not designed well enough to get students to undertake an analysis and synthesis of the course information. When students are making those types of linkages they have developed the skills to learn autonomously and excel academically. When students see previous or sample exam papers they can quickly gauge the level of engagement with the material required to meet the teachers' expectations and to achieve their desired grade.

Awareness-raising is as important as behaviour change and sometimes raising a student's awareness of their own learning styles and preferences is all that can be done in one course. Making students consciously aware of their incompetence assists them in building awareness so that they will eventually move from being unconsciously incompetent to unconsciously competent and this is a transition that is not likely in one semester for all but the most talented of students. The scaffolding mentioned in this chapter as a cause of concern should not be seen as such as it allows each student in a mixed class to move at their own pace. Those who reach the top of the scaffold early will expand beyond the control imposed by it and those still climbing at semester's end will hopefully know themselves better and be in a better position to develop their skills to move from surviving academically to excelling.

Part Three

We are grateful to Michael Hennessy for taking the time to comment on our paper, and he has raised some points we would like to address in our conclusion. He raises an important point when he mentions that promoting autonomous learning is 'a challenge to every teacher and should be considered as a key learning outcome in every programme.' Ideally, there would be a unified approach to autonomous learning across our department. We have concerns about whether our students are getting the opportunities to practice their autonomous behaviour in other courses, as we cannot be sure that all members of the department share our views on the importance of promoting autonomous behaviour. However, in our language classes, we encourage our students to apply the various skills the

Learner Autonomy course has promoted. We believe this reinforcement has helped to validate the autonomy course from the students' perspective.

Conclusion

While there is obviously more work to be done to raise the profile of the course across our department, we believe that the Learner Autonomy course has improved since our arrival at Meisei University. When we began working here in 2011, we had limited significant experience with the concept of fostering autonomy, so the teaching of the course was initially quite daunting. Over the last two years, we have made efforts to inform ourselves as to how we should best approach the course. This process has included sharing ideas with each other and collaborating on research and presentations, as well as attending conferences and visiting universities that offer similar courses. We now feel we are in a position to offer the kind of informed advice which might ensure that future teachers are aware that while 'almost all learners need to be prepared and supported on the path towards greater autonomy by teachers' (Sheerin, 1997, p. 63), they are also conscious of the dangers of providing either too much or too little support. We feel that striking an appropriate balance in this regard is fundamental to dealing with concerns about fauxtonomy.

There continue to be differences of opinion as to the amount of guidance that should be provided for future teachers, ranging from moderate scaffolding to a complete, fully structured syllabus with weekly lesson plans. The pitfall of providing too much structure would be that the course would not evolve. As continually incorporating new ideas and research is crucial to the course, particularly given the ever-changing resources available online, we need to provide necessary practical support for our colleagues, without creating an environment where teachers become complacent regarding the discovery of new resources and approaches. We realize that the question regarding the point at which scaffolded support ceases to be beneficial to the teacher, but actually hinders their ability to independently develop their own awareness of the best approach for them, is an issue which mirrors our concerns about the level of guidance we should provide to our students. In this paper we have described the concept of fauxtonomy, which is a term we use to describe our belief that it is necessary to initially limit our students' choices in order to help them develop the capacity for autonomous learning. The classroom is not the ideal site to gauge our students' development as autonomous learners, as our students still see us as authority figures, although they may come to view us as advisors rather than teachers. We recognize that it is difficult for our students to act autonomously within the confines of the classroom, but we do see evidence that they are taking a more active role in making decisions regarding aspects of their own learning. Although it may seem paradoxical, the careful management of their exposure to resources which constitute fauxtonomy has been successful in helping our students become more autonomous. We hope and believe that, as a result of the course, they are better equipped to plan and execute their learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Note

1. The course can be described as Freirian in that the aim of the course is to facilitate the students' development of knowledge and critical thinking skills which will empower them to take constructive action in their society.

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