
REVIEWS

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Edited by **PAUL KEI MATSUDA**

Arizona State University

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Maintaining Control: Autonomy and Language Learning

Richard Pemberton, Sarah Toogood, and Andy Barfield. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 292.

■ This book provides a diverse collection of research-based discussions on theory, practice, and commentary on teacher and learner autonomy (LA). A sequel to *Taking Control: Autonomy in Language Learning* (Pemberton, Li, Or, & Pierson, 1996), *Maintaining Control* consists of theoretical chapters as well as studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Europe, and Asia. The first section is an introductory chapter; the second section consists of three chapters discussing contemporary issues of autonomy theories; the next two sections include eight chapters presenting studies and reflections on the practices of teacher and LA; and the final section is a commentary chapter.

After an introductory chapter explaining the origin of the project, the book devotes its second section to theories and discourses of autonomy and language learning. In Chapter 2, Phil Benson discusses the original concept of autonomy, autonomy in language learning, and current issues of its operationalisation. He starts with the most widely accepted definition of LA by Holec (1981), adopts three metaphoric strategies to synthesize the conceptualization of LA, and argues for a legitimate definition of LA. The conclusion raises a question about the two diverged directions of LA objectives, that is, to produce active learners to fit into the current socioeconomic environment or to prepare learners with capabilities of controlling their own learning activities in their own world.

Chapter 3 discusses the mainstream and dissonances of LA conceptually. Drawing on the literature in the field over the past 10 years, Edith Esch analyses the ambiguity of LA and its contextual reasons which have led to different interpretations of this construct. She argues that LA is currently at a crossroad with two options. The first option is to

strive for individual personal autonomy, potentially leading to individualistic culture which may nurture resistance to professional and developmental changes. The second option is to lay importance on critical thinking and the sociocultural dimension of learning. This will turn the development of LA into a never-ending process because it requires interactions and negotiations between learners and their communities. A research agenda for the future is proposed in the end.

Chapter 4 uses three examples from two different contexts to present discursive dissonances in promoting language learning autonomy due to social, cultural, and linguistic factors. Constraints and pressures from community, authority, institution, and personal belief are used to illustrate the conflicts in the contexts of foreign language teaching in France and Luxembourg. Philip Liley considers schools a point of social knowledge systems and considers teaching a form of managing that knowledge. Therefore, teaching methods used in a particular system need to culturally fit into that system. The author also puts forward suggestions for dissonances caused by intrapersonal conflicts resulting from experiences and factors other than language learning, such as globalization.

Section 3 discusses practices of LA. Chapter 5 presents a set of data from focus group conversations in an English secondary school, depicting the issue of controlling learning activities with considerations paid to student, teacher, and family factors. Terry Lamb indicates that young learners with different levels of motivation have different perceptions of their ability and responsibility. Therefore, teachers should be able to properly adjust the level of control given to their students and create constructive dialogue channels to get students' voices heard by the system.

In Chapter 6, Sara Cotterall presents a study on the development of metacognitive knowledge in relation with LA readiness. Thirteen undergraduate students in a university writing course in New Zealand are provided with explicit and critical instructions to enhance their personal, task, and strategic knowledge about academic writing skills in 12 weeks. As a result, this limited-scale investigation indicates that treatments such as explicit explanation and practice during lectures and workshops facilitate students' metacognitive knowledge about writing and help them transfer this newly acquired knowledge to other contexts, indicating a move toward greater independence.

Chapter 7 reports on another study which integrates the five stages of learner centredness—awareness, involvement, intervention, creation, and transcendence—into reflective lesson planning (RLP) to promote LA. After establishing a firm relationship between student-centred approaches and the definition of learner autonomy, Lindsay Miller presents RLP to a group of secondary school teachers in a MA TESL program and asks them to use it for their listening class. He concludes

that RLP, provided with teachers' reconceptualisation of their teaching approach, can promote LA within the classroom.

In Chapter 8, Leni Dam discusses student and teacher uses of a learning diary/logbook as an attempt to develop LA. Data collected from teenagers learning English as a foreign language indicate that appropriate use of a logbook allows teachers to effectively interact with their students' learning process, reshape their own teaching roles, and be motivated during their professional development.

Section 4 addresses issues in practices of teacher autonomy. David Little starts Chapter 9 by drawing on the literature in individual-cognitive and sociocultural processes of humans to discuss the principles of an autonomy-promoted language learning approach. Using data from Integrated Ireland Language and Training where the European Language Portfolio (ELP) was adopted in the English language program, he argues that ELP supports learners' involvement, proper use of target language, and reflection. ELP also allows teachers to think about their teaching activities consciously and explicitly through dialogic and interactive activities with the learners.

In Chapter 10, Barbara Sinclair reports on the pilot phase of the e-China projects, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council of England and the Chinese Ministry of Education. The project goal is to design e-materials for a professional development course, employing rich multimedia, simple navigation, personalized tools, and group discussion space with particular consideration paid to sociocultural contexts of China. Aiming at providing learners with greater knowledge, autonomy, and confidence at work, the course is offered to 12 secondary school Chinese teachers of English. Data from the course participants indicate that the course structure and space give teachers opportunities to reflect critically on their teaching experience and exercise their metacognitive knowledge although choices offered during the course are not always appreciated.

Chapter 11, through a constructivist narrative of Naoko Aoki and Hiroaki Kobayashi, presents several episodes from a teacher and his trainer in the area of teaching Japanese as a second language. The story indicates that teacher autonomy can be constructed, cumulatively developed, and successfully transferred by individual, school, and social factors during the whole course of personal growth. The trainee teacher's achievements in autonomy also lead to the trainer's enhancement of positive attitudes toward developing LA.

Chapter 12 reports on a long-term reform of the English curriculum development in a Japanese university to attain better cooperation, resources, and practices. During the process of this liberal-humanist approach in constructing the curriculum with involvement from different parties, Mike Nix and Andy Barfield indicate that factors such as personal interpretation, communication, and power contribute to the

collaborative discussions. It is the opportunity that helps illustrate the in-service teachers' diversified manifestations of autonomy through dialogue, reflections, collaboration, or even resistance.

The book finishes with a commentary chapter, an overall response to the main body of the book. Richard Smith and Ema Ushioda address different contemporary aspects of learner and teacher autonomy such as conceptualization, interpretation, and promoting tools and practices in globalized and localized contexts. After asserting the social-situated turn, discursive discussions, and diversified perspectives of LA, they suggest further collaborations to promote the authentic concept of LA without neglecting other voices and restraining opportunities for autonomy development from particular contexts.

Overall, this book is worth reading for its coverage of the complexity and diversity of LA at different levels with appropriate considerations paid to global and local contexts. It provides readers an excellent overview of the issues and challenges them with several perspectives adopted in different, even opposite, sociocultural contexts. Being a "10-years-on collection" (p. 10), some of the data presented here were collected 6–10 years ago, but the conversations are totally current and fit well into the contemporary research. This book will appeal mostly to teachers/trainers promoting LA in their classes and adopting teacher autonomy in their professional development. It is also a useful reference for researchers and material designers in the field.

REFERENCES

- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy in foreign language learning*. Oxford, England: Pergamon.
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TIN TAN DANG

*La Trobe University
Bundoora, Victoria, Australia*

Constructivist Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners

Adelman Sharon Reyes and Trina Lynn Vallone. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008. Pp. xx + 208.

■ As indicated by the title, the goal of this book is to help teachers apply constructivist methods in their classrooms. The critical constructivist education for ELLs "is grounded in principles of educational equity, second language acquisition, constructivism, and critical pedagogy" (pp. 170–171).

Reyes and Vallone's book consists of nine chapters, an appendix, and a glossary. Chapter 1 shares perspectives in second language acquisition and