Autonomy-oriented reflective practice: From teachers to learners

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Outline

Motivation for this study

Literature review & research questions

Research setting, participants & methods

Findings

Discussion and reflections
Therefore the sage says:

我无为, 而民自化; 我好静, 而民自正;
我无事, 而民自富; 我无欲, 而民自朴。

I do nothing, and the people, by themselves, evolve;

I say nothing, and the people, by themselves, go right;

I disturb nothing, and the people, by themselves, prosper;

I desire nothing, and the people, by themselves, remain simple and pure.

Tao Tzu (6th Century BC)

A healthy society
(co-)governed
by its people
Chinese National Curriculum Reform

The New Curriculum Standards for secondary English (Years 6-9) aims to stimulate students’ interest for English learning, to help them build up confidence as well as develop good study skills and effective learning strategies, and to enhance autonomous learning ability and collaborative awareness, […] so as to lay a good foundation for their lifelong learning and personal development. (China MoE, 2001)
From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side

Alison King

In college classrooms, the professor functions as the sage on the stage—the one who has the knowledge and who shares it with students, who simply remember the | information and have no part in it as an active, often without even thinking about it. This model of the teacher-learning process, called the transmission model, assumes that the students’ internal process of comprehension and meaning-making of the professor’s knowledge is not taken into account. In this view of teaching and learning, students are passive learners rather than active ones. Such a view is misleading and will not be effective for the twenty-first century, when individuals will be expected to construct their own knowledge. This means that students must develop the skills to think critically and to construct knowledge on their own.

According to the current constructive-process theory of learning, knowledge does not come packaged in books, or journals, or unique skills (or professors) and students “bought” or memorized instantaneously. Instead, knowledge is a state of understanding and can only come at the moment of the individual learner, as such, knowledge must be constructed—or in other words, knowledge must be “unlearned” as much as it is constructed. This is known in the constructivistic literature as the process of re-construction—by such individual learners through the process of trying to make sense of the new information in terms of what the individual already knows. In this construction-oriented view of learning, the role of the professor is to help students understand new material, in particular, they generate relationships between new and old ideas and between new material and information already in the mind (see also Bransford, Brown, and Campione 1990; Winne 1993).

When students are engaged in actively constructing knowledge by reorganizing their own ideas in such a way as to make sense of new information, they are not only more likely to remember it and apply it in new situations. This approach to learning is consistent with information-processing theories, which suggest that reorganizing gives greater permanence to information or generating new information based on what is previously held helps solidify cognitive structures that connect the new ideas and link them to what is already known. According to the constructivist approach to understanding and organizing the new material and make it easier to remember.

In contrast to the transmission model described by the classroom lecture—taking notes, the constructivist model emphasizes at the center of the process, the students—constructing meaning, drawing and discussing ideas while making meaning for themselves. And the professor, instead of being the “sage on the stage,” functions as a “guide on the side.”

The professor is still responsible for presenting the course materials, but he or she guides the students and helps the students document their own learning with the information—students with a philosophy are involved in understanding the ideas and relate them to what they already know. Essentially, the professor’s role is to encourage student interaction with the material and with each other in the classroom. In this new model the professor takes on new roles, role-sharing responsibilities, such as information and Burr knowing knowledge and expertise, along with previously internal cognitive tools (such as learning strategies, attentiveness, and critical thinking skills). Hence, students are given new roles, in this new model as they share the role of the professor. The role-sharing model encourages students to think in unique ways.

Change is never easy, usually, however, changes are easier to bring about by modeling existing practices than by forcing them. So, we will begin by identifying the activities that can be incorporated into a typical lecture, then we will move on to

(King, 1993)
Literature framework

LA
(Holec, 1981; Benson, 2001, 2011)
- What
- Why
- How

TC
(Borg, 2003, 2006)
- Know
- Believe
- Think

RP
(Farrell, 2007)
- Reflection-in-action
- Reflection-on-action
- Reflection-for-action
LA: what

“the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981, p. 3)

(Reinders, 2010, p. 51)
“the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec, 1981, p. 3)

“a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action” (Little, 1991, p. 4)

“the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices” (Crabbe, 1993, p. 443)

“learners’ ability and willingness to make choices independently” (Littlewood, 1996, p. 427)

“the capacity to take control of one’s own learning” (Benson, 2001, p. 47; 2011, p. 58)

- ability
- desire
- freedom
- learning management
- cognitive process
- learning content

(Huang and Benson, 2013)
Dimensions of LA

I: Vygotskian approaches
II: Community of practice

(Oxford, 2003)

(Benson, 1997)
LA: Why

- LA has been widely recognised as a universally legitimate and desirable educational goal, for (Benson, 2011; Little, 1991)
  - language learning
  - learning in general
  - personal development
  - a healthy democratic society
LA: How - Control shift

- *The key factor is “the opportunity for students to make decisions regarding their learning within a collaborative and supportive environment”* (Benson, 2001, p. 151).

- *Autonomous learning demands “the teacher’s power be lessened and the learner’s power concomitantly increased”* (Voller, 1997, p. 106).

- *The construction of autonomy is achieved through “the deliberate surrendering of certain prerogatives by the teacher accompanied by the concomitant acceptance of responsibility by the learner or learners”* (Candy, 1991, p. 9).
Tips/pitfalls in the control transition

- Role re-allocation
- Appropriate support
- Spontaneous actions
Why TC on LA?

- The effect of any new curriculum initiative depends largely on teachers’ understanding of the key notions concerned in the innovations. (Wedell, 2009)

- While LA has been widely researched from various aspects, there remains “a significant gap” in exploring language teachers’ understanding of the concept of LA. (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012a, p. 3)
Connecting TC & RP

“the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81).
Research questions

1. In what ways was learner/teacher control supported in the context?

2. What reflections did the teachers demonstrate regarding their autonomy-oriented practice?
Research setting, participants & methods

Zia: A Chinese private secondary school

Principal
- Interview

Executive Director
- Interviews
- Innovation project documents

T1 – T9
- Observations
- Post-lesson discussions
- Interviews
A school LA innovation project

A suggested ACE Model
- Autonomous
- Collaborative
- Efficient

- self-study
- group discussion
- group presentation
- peer feedback
- peer evaluation
- internalisation
Teacher support for the LA innovation

- **Teacher training workshops (experiential learning & groupwork)**
- **Group-based classroom management (Performance Points)**
- **Team lesson planning (Learning Guide)**
- **Peer observation & evaluation (Evaluation Standards)**
- **Collective discussions & peer feedback giving (Reflective report)**
Evidence for learner control

LA-oriented practices

- Self-study
- Group work
- Presentation
- Peer feedback
- Peer evaluation
- Peer teaching
- Choices and decision making

- Pre-lesson presentation
- Group-based collaborative learning
- Student-led peer teaching
- Reported individual practices
Degree of learner control varied significantly ...

Pattern 4
Reciting a text from textbook

Pattern 3
Performing a textbook-based dialogue

Pattern 2
Reciting a poem chosen by students but approved by teacher

Pattern 1
Delivering a short speech of students’ choice

Training ss to recite in T-favoured pronunciation & intonation

Presenters re-writing textbook dialogues

Ss nominating presenters and negotiating on text selection;
Presenter telling about the text in his own words;
Peer-evaluating the recitation

Team-presenting;
Presenter teaching vocabulary;
Ask-&-answer about the presentation
TC about LA

What did the teachers know about the *what*, *why*, and *how* about LA?

Did they believe in their students’ capacity for LA?

What did they think they had done?

Teacher cognition
TC about LA

- Autonomy is an inner strength, which keeps people calm and confident in all situations; it is the capacity to act independently and analyse and solve problems by oneself, with or without external help. (T2.I)

- “But what on earth is autonomous learning? Having observed these many lessons, it seemed that the so-called autonomous learning was just students studying in silence. (T1.I)

- As long as I let students go and provide appropriate support, students do well, and often they perform much beyond much my expectations. (T2.I)

- I know I should give students more opportunities for them to inquire by themselves, but I’m always concerned that they can’t understand fully. (T5.I)

- It certainly takes time to let students to figure out things by themselves, but it’s beneficial in the long run. (T2.L1.PLD)

- Presentation takes a lot of time and students make mistakes, but there’s just too much to cover in a lesson, so often I have to cut that short or out to move on. (T1.L1.PLD)
Teacher support & Teacher professional autonomy

- Collaborative inquiry about the LA innovation;
- Flexible adoption of the suggested model;
- Not concerning much about the evaluation results;
- Proactive peer-observation and seeking critical feedback.

- Compulsory participation of all workshops and required number of observations;
- Unnecessary scrutiny of lesson plan/LG;
- Evaluative element contained in the given model;
- Compulsory all-on-all observations and feedback giving;
- Genuine systematic reflection not much in evidence.
Revisit LA Guidelines/principles in literature

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<td>• awareness</td>
<td>• be actively involved in students’ learning</td>
<td>• learner involvement</td>
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<td>• involvement</td>
<td>• provide options and resources</td>
<td>• learner reflection</td>
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<td>• intervention</td>
<td>• offer choices and decision-making opportunities</td>
<td>• appropriate target language use</td>
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<td>• creation</td>
<td>• support learners</td>
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<td>• transcendence</td>
<td>• encourage reflection</td>
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Examine TP in reference to LA Guidelines/principles in literature

- learner involvement (+)
- learner reflection (-)
- appropriate target language use (-)

Diagram:
- self-study
- group discussion
- group presentation
- peer feedback
- peer evaluation
- internalisation
Teacher support & Teacher professional autonomy

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Rethink about LA Strategies/techniques in literature

Benson (1997)

- authentic interaction with the target language and its users
- collaborative group work and collective decision making
- participation in open-ended learning tasks
- learning about the target language and its social contexts of use
- exploration of societal and personal learning goals
- criticism of learning tasks and materials
- self-production of tasks and materials
- control over the management of learning
- control over the content of learning
- control over resources
- discussion and criticism of target language norms
Benson (2003)

- Encouraging student preparation.
- Drawing on out-of-class experience.
- Using ‘authentic’ materials and ‘real’ language.
- Independent inquiry.
- Involve students in task design.
- Encouraging student-student interaction.
- Peer teaching.
- Encouraging divergent student outcomes.
- Self- and peer-assessment.
- Encourage reflection.
Nunan (2003)

- Step 1: Make instruction goals clear to learners
- Step 2: Allow learners to create their own goals
- Step 3: Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom
- Step 4: Raise awareness of learning processes
- Step 5: Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies
- Step 6: Encourage learner choice
- Step 7: Allow learners to generate their own tasks
- Step 8: Encourage learners to become teachers
- Step 9: Encourage learners to become researchers
Little (2006)

- use the target language as the preferred medium of classroom communication and require the same of her learners;
- involve her learners in a non-stop quest for good learning activities, which are shared, discussed, analysed and evaluated with the whole class – in the target language, to begin with in very simple terms;
- help her learners to set their own learning targets and choose their own learning activities, subjecting them to discussion, analysis and evaluation – again, in the target language;
- require her learners to identify individual goals but pursue them through collaborative work in small groups;
- require her learners to keep a written record of their learning – plans of lessons and projects, lists of useful vocabulary, whatever texts they themselves produce;
- engage her learners in regular evaluation of their progress as individual learners and as a class – in the target language.
A tentative mapping

Teachers giving control to learners
• e.g., allowing learner choice or divergent student outcomes

Learners preparing to take control
• e.g., raise awareness of learning processes, helping learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies

Learners taking control
• e.g., involving students in task design, learners becoming teachers or researchers

Learners reflecting on control-taking
• e.g., criticism of learning tasks and materials, criticism of target language norms, and reflection
A step further to bring everything together

- Awareness, knowledge & beliefs
- Awareness, willingness & metacognitive knowledge of LA
- Actions and interactions using target/authentic language
- Reflection
- Reflection

Teachers giving control to students
Learners preparing to take control
Learners taking control
Learners reflecting on control-taking
Teachers reflecting on control-giving
References

Thank You!

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