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Editorial

Katherine Thornton, Kanda University of International Studies

Self-Access, Learner Autonomy and Advising for Language Learning

A very warm welcome to the first issue of SiSAL journal of 2012, a special issue associated with the recent IATEFL Learner Autonomy SIG-sponsored conference, Advising for Language Learner Autonomy, held on November 12, 2011, at Kanda University of International Studies. This issue features papers from presenters at the conference who are all involved in advising for language learning (ALL). This conference was the first to be entirely dedicated to the field of language advising, and as such marks another significant landmark in the journey of ALL towards being fully recognized as a professional field in its own right (previous landmarks being the publication of the first book on advising in 2001 by Mozzon-McPherson and Vismans, a special issue of *System* in 2007, and the introduction of a professional qualification in learning advising at the University of Hull).

ALL, defined by Carson and Mynard in the introduction to their upcoming book on advising as “the process of assisting students in directing their own paths in order to become better, more autonomous language learners” (forthcoming) is a diverse field, covering a range of practices which vary in terms of mode, situation and participants. While usually thought of as a spoken discipline, taking place in face-to-face advising sessions, advising can also be conducted in written mode, when learners' written reflections on learning are shared with and responded to by advisors. ALL can be conducted in both self access and classroom environments, and encompasses a wide range of participants. Learners may interact with full-time advisors, teachers or administrative staff taking on advising roles part-time or student peer advisors, who may be paid or employed on a volunteer basis. A variety of terms exist for these participants: advisors, counsellors, mentors, to list those that appear in this collection. Learners who choose to engage with advising services also do so for a variety of reasons, and come from a diverse range of backgrounds (although all the present studies have been conducted in tertiary education contexts).

In this special issue, contributors explore the ways in which advising can enhance the learning development of language learners, and address some of the challenges

which face practitioners as they seek to develop systems for effective engagement with learners at their institutions. Issues explored include learner cognition, professional development for advisors, advising discourse and language policies.

Luke Carson's study of learners' cognitive processes during the completion of independent learning tasks highlights the importance of metacognitive processing and the need for advisors to increase learners' awareness of these processes. Carson's study has found, through verbal protocol analysis, in which learners think aloud while completing an independent task, that contrary to some representations in the literature, learners engaged in such learning all engage in extensive multidimensional metacognitive processing, but the degree of success varies from learner to learner. He suggests that advisors should therefore ask themselves not how to *encourage* such processing in learners, but how to make it more *effective*.

Maria Giovanna Tassinari describes a dynamic model for learner autonomy which can facilitate evaluation of the language learning process, and which forms the basis of advising dialogue at her own institution at the Freie Universität Berlin. Accessing the model independently through the university website, a learner can choose the descriptors for the areas which are most relevant to her situation in order to self-assess her own development. This self-assessment then forms the foundation for an advising dialogue with an advisor, who can help the learners to evaluate their progress, set or refine learning goals.

Tassinari's data suggests that learners benefit both from using the model, ideally with support from an advisor, to structure and facilitate their reflection, and evaluate their development as autonomous language learners.

Several articles in this collection address the role of language in advising. **Jo Mynard** and **Katherine Thornton** contribute to the growing literature on written advising by investigating the discourse of written advising, identifying common discursive devices that advisors use when interacting with learners. By examining the weekly comments made by seven advisors to students participating in a self-directed learning programme, the authors highlight the way in which different devices reflect different degrees of directiveness in the responses advisors make to learners' reflections. Through their choices, advisors negotiate their power relationships with learners, employing individual preferences in advising techniques, while also responding to their perceptions of student need.

John Adamson and **Naoki Fujimoto-Adamson** also investigate the discourse of advising sessions, but their focus is on translanguaging and the role of L1 and L2 in both advising sessions and the wider context of a self-access centre. Taking data from several sources (questionnaire responses from a survey investigating SAC use, interviews with students using the advising service and transcriptions of counseling and other SAC interactions), Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson document the change in their SAC's language policy from English-only to one in which learners are given the choice over which language to use when interacting with each other and advisors at the centre. Their investigation suggests that learners benefit by being encouraged to negotiate and reflect upon their language use, as this mirrors the decision-making process that they will engage in in multilingual contexts.

Satoko Kato highlights the benefits of an “intentional reflective dialogue” as part of continuing professional development for learning advisors to prevent fossilization of advising practice. Through prompting advisors to reflect deeply on their advising experiences in semi-structured interviews with the researcher, Kato demonstrates how some advisors are able to question and possibly alter their existing beliefs about advising practice, opening themselves up to alternative perspectives, or see contradictions between their own belief and practice. She also indicates the benefits of such intentional reflective dialogue for the interviewer herself, and advocates the use of such a dialogue between advisors as part of a professional development programme for advisors.

Yukiko Ishikawa also touches on the role of beliefs in advising, in this case peer advisors, in her study of peer advising at her own institution. Through a case study of a senior student employed as a student advisor, she investigates how this peer advisor approached her advising sessions, with a particular emphasis on learner beliefs. Ishikawa demonstrates how the peer advisor was influenced by her own beliefs and experiences as a language learner, but that she engaged with these beliefs critically while reflecting on the best way to advise her peers. Ishikawa’s study points to the benefits of peer advising for both advisor and advisee.

Satomi Shibata addresses a very pertinent issue in advising for language learning: how best to encourage learners to engage with the learning support available in a SAC. As part of her larger autoethnographic PhD research study, Shibata identifies the existence of what she terms micro- counseling, informal encounters between counselors and users of the SAC which may encourage these learners to eventually

engage in more formal, focused counseling sessions (macro-counseling). By describing her own experiences and observations about such micro-counseling, Shibata encourages advisors to reflect upon their own informal interactions with learners and to pay attention to the ways in which they engage with learners using a SAC.

Finally **Azusa Kodate** has contributed a review of the recent Forum on Growing Trends in Self Access held by the Japan Association of Self Access Learning (JASAL) at JALT 2011. This year's forum contained seven different presentations and a lively discussion, on various aspects of self-access learning. The author identifies three main themes emerging from the presentations: focusing on the physical learning environment, providing easier access to learners, and supporting learning processes. See the review for more information on how to get involved with JASAL.

We hope that you find the articles in this volume thought-provoking and relevant to your own practice. As the distinct field of advising in language learning continues to develop, the issues addressed, such as professional development, evaluation in advising, ways to encourage learner engagement with advising and how best to direct learners' metacognitive processes, are ones which need to be explored further. We hope that this collection is a valuable contribution to the field.

Katherine Thornton

Co-Editor

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Developing a Deeper Understanding of Learning Processing During Unguided Complex Learning Tasks: Implications for Language Advising

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Abstract

This paper outlines a research project that is mapping cognitive, metacognitive and other processing types and their interactions in complex learning situations, specifically in learning situations without teacher guidance. It presents some examples from the findings of this project and the implications for learning advisors working with adult (tertiary level) advisees who are engaged, to a large degree, with independent forms of learning. When we look at learning occurring without instruction, we see very dynamic thinking processes that involve continuous movement between the upper and lower levels of cognitive processing. The manner of this processing differs from learning processing during classroom learning, which is highly structured and directed. As the main difference between independent learning and classroom learning is the absence of a teacher, this paper focuses on the type of processing that takes on the cognitive functions created by this absence – metacognitive processing. The data shows that, for the population in this study, all learners involved in independent learning necessarily engaged in frequent metacognitive processes, though with greater and lesser levels of success or effectiveness. This research indicates that it is not possible to complete any form of complex independent learning task without engaging in frequent upper level processing. The paper then discusses what this means for learning advisors, and how we discuss learning concepts and learning control with advisees, through ideas such as using existing knowledge, and the planning, monitoring and control of learning.

Keywords: cognition, metacognition, complex learning tasks

Complex Learning Tasks and Independent Learning

Much of the research on cognitive processing in learning is the result of crossover between the fields of education and cognitive science (Son, 2007). While this has brought great benefit to understanding learning, it has also brought with it the examination of learning from a research position that is traditionally laboratory-based, where elements are controlled for. However, learning advisors tend to work with students who will be working independently, in various physical and contextual environments, with various goals and needs, and strengths and weaknesses. In other words, they will be working in a manner that is less controlled than a laboratory, and less controlled than a classroom setting, or the learning settings examined in much of the research to date. Rather than taking the understandings of learning processing

gleaned from such research, and using it to guide learning advising, it is the position of this paper that learning advisors need to understand learning as it will occur for their advisees in the real world; that is, learning that is complex, and subject to influence by the many variables present.

In this paper, complex learning tasks are considered to be any learning tasks that involve understanding, remembering, combining or using more than one discrete item. Complex learning will occur during a learning task where exacting instruction (instruction requiring a student to engage with one or two elements, and then stop and wait for the next instruction) is not provided, and completion requires engagement with many elements, be they content elements or options for undertaking and completing the task. In a language-learning scenario, if students are asked to check a vocabulary item in a dictionary, they are not engaged in complex learning. However, if they are asked to prepare a presentation in a second language (either by themselves or with peers), they are engaged in complex learning, since it involves engagement with multiple elements and steps that are interconnected (e.g. planning how to use time, deciding who will perform different tasks, understanding content, checking language, synthesizing content, combining ideas).

If independent learning can be defined as “the act of learning without (or with decreasing amounts of) external direction, guidance and evaluation” (Carson, 2012), then independent learning is very obviously complex learning. In this paper, this definition is used rather than others, and rather than terminologies such as autonomous learning or self-regulated learning, because these terminologies and their definitions often either explicitly or implicitly include the concept of volitional learning. While such learning is also complex learning, it excludes a huge range of learning endeavours that are undertaken independently, but where the initial impetus or decision to engage in the learning was not volitional, or perhaps where the content was pre-determined. Some examples of non-volitional but independent learning would be in-class learning without step-by-step instruction, project learning, individual test preparation, thesis writing and some work-based learning (learning that occurs as part of our working lives – while adults often volitionally chose what and when to learn, this is not always the case in career situations where acquiring new knowledge, of for example, a new computer system, is a requirement rather than a choice).

Another reason for defining independent learning in this way, and for using this definition has to do with the ‘researchability’ of such learning – “One of the most challenging issues that confronts educational researchers is explaining how students learn in self-regulated contexts, such as when studying or practicing on their own” (Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009, p.299). By examining ‘non-volitional’ learning, it is possible for the researcher to create some degree of structure to allow for the accurate collection of valid data, through, for example, setting specific learning tasks, or choosing a specific ‘site’ for learning.

Why Examine Learning Processing?

In order to understand learning, we need to know what happens when people are learning. However, as learning situations become more learner-centred, less teacher-directed, more independent and autonomous, what the learner must do in these situations changes. It follows from this that existing knowledge and research on learning and learning processing in more static or teacher-centred settings, upon which many theories of learning and the creation of learning interventions sit, may not be applicable to or indicative of the type, range, frequency, hierarchies and importance of learning processing that occurs during less guided complex learning. For learning advisors, who typically work with students engaged with learning at the more independent end of the spectrum, the dialogue and tools they choose to use with advisees should be based upon a clear understanding of learning processing in this context. As Benson (2011) notes: “Learners who are asked to take greater control of their learning, or who are forced by circumstances to do so, may be able to self-manage their learning, but they will not necessarily have the cognitive competencies that will make self-management systematic or effective” (pp.111-112). Only by more deeply examining learning that requires these ‘cognitive competencies’ can we understand what they are and how they function in different contexts, and in turn, advise for them.

What is Metacognition?

Metacognition has been defined and conceptualized differently across a wide range of academic disciplines – education, psychology, philosophy, cognitive science and more. Flavell, often seen as the father of metacognition defined it as follows: “Metacognition refers to one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes or anything related to them, e.g., the learning-relevant properties of information or data. For example, I am engaging in metacognition if I notice that I am having more trouble learning A than B; if it strikes me that I should double check C before accepting it as fact” (Flavell, 1976, p. 232).

Another definition that brings up an issue central to this paper is that of Pressley & McCormick (1995) who state that metacognition is:

“knowledge of thinking processes, both knowledge of the thinking occurring in the here and now (e.g., “I am really struggling to figure out how to write this introduction; I believe that the introduction I have just written makes sense”) and in the long-term (e.g., “I know a number of specific strategies for planning a composition, rough drafting it, and revising the draft”)” (p. 27).

What makes this definition useful is the inclusion of thinking ‘in the here and now’ and ‘in the long term’. This inclusion is central to understanding metacognitive processing in independent learning, and to distinguish it from understood conceptualisations of self-regulation as a regular, but low frequency, cyclical process, as espoused by researchers in that field (Brown, 1987; Kaplan, 2008; Schunk, 2008; Veenman, 2007; Zimmerman, 2002, 2008). In other words, metacognition in independent learning is also a prevalent, ‘during learning’ type of processing, not only an occasional governing type of processing that links and controls cycles or episodes of learning. It functions on both levels – at the very local level within a learning task (e.g. deciding to spend time rewriting an answer before beginning the next section), and at the more global level (e.g. being aware that you make certain grammar errors often and deciding to be conscious and controlling of these in future learning).

Methodology and Data Collection

The data discussed in this paper are part of a larger data set that was collected using a grounded theory methodology (GTM). GTM was developed by Strauss and Glazer as a framework for analyzing qualitative data and has been defined as “a qualitative research method that uses a systematized set of procedures to develop and inductively derive grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.24), the goal of which is “to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour, which is relevant to those involved” (Glaser, 1978, p.3). As such, the larger data set was not collected in order to prove any hypothesis, but rather to elucidate what was happening during learning.

To look at learning processing during complex learning, concurrent verbal protocol analysis (VPA) was used. VPA is a method where subjects are asked to verbalize what they are doing and what they are thinking while undertaking a task (concurrent VPA), or verbalising this through prompting after undertaking a task (stimulated recall VPA). Some researchers claim VPA “offers a much more direct window on processing than other forms of comprehension measurement” (Pressley, 2000, p.291). Through training the participants to vocalise all thoughts occurring during the activity, these vocalisations reflect the individual’s thought processes, and the reasons for the resulting actions, or what the participants think they are doing. However, there are issues with VPA as a method of inquiry, as a data collection tool, such as the possibility that “these procedures may disrupt the verbal processing of the task” (Ward & Traweek, 1993, p.472).

Yet, by using the concurrent form of VPA, this can be avoided. What is required is a think aloud protocol without reactive effects that does not disrupt or change spontaneous thought. While a reactive tool has very beneficial effects on thinking, for the purposes of looking at cognitive processing exactly as it occurs, a non-reactive form is required. Ericsson & Simon (1998) have made a clear distinction between these two forms. What is important here in terms of data collection is that this ‘covert thinking’ is not altered by the process- “perhaps the single most important precondition for successful direct expression of thinking is that the participants are allowed to maintain undisputed focus on the completion of the task while thinking aloud and merely to verbalize their thoughts rather than describe or explain them to anyone else” (Ericsson & Simon, 1998, p.181). In other words, subjects (using

concurrent rather than stimulated recall VPA) are not analyzing the task in an abstracted sense; rather, they are simply doing the task and verbalizing what is occurring, thus not disrupting the natural progression or sequence of their thoughts. This led to the choice of concurrent VPA as a data collection tool in this study.

Criticisms of VPA discuss reactivity and automaticity. However, with regard to reactivity when using concurrent protocols, there are as yet no empirical studies to indicate that the procedure causes processing to change (Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Leow & Morgan-Short, 2004). The issue of automaticity relates to the fact that learners may automatically engage in some processing, and as such not verbalize or report it. However, this issue can be overcome in a number of ways. In this study, it was overcome by video-recording all VPAs and by having a large data set size. Two examples of metacognitive activity that were generally automatic in this study (and as such not verbalized) were the decisions to re-read text that had not been fully comprehended, and the decision about when to take notes about important information. The video-recordings made it possible to see when these activities occurred, even though they did not appear in the VPA transcripts. The large data set gave confirmation that, for the subject population, these activities occurred often, and unlike many others were largely automatic.

Findings

In the larger project, participants were asked to engage in a variety of independent complex learning tasks. In a grounded theory research project, the goal is not to prove or disprove a hypothesis, but rather to develop a data driven understanding of something. In this project, the goal was to understand how metacognition occurs during independent learning, as there is absence of empirical research on this specific area – how do learners engage in metacognitive processing as they take control of their own learning?

A theoretical sample was used, in line with grounded theory methodology, and participants engaged in a variety of learning tasks (some focused on learning domain-specific academic content, others on planning learning or on non-domain-specific learning). Participants also engaged in individual, pair and group learning scenarios. The study was undertaken at a Japanese university with 30 English language major students, and as such, the findings cannot be considered widely generalisable (rather a

starting point for further research). The participants had all chosen to take a university elective course about independent learning. All were trained in the process of verbal protocol analysis before the research began. Given the scope of this paper, and for the purpose of discussion, only some of the findings are presented here. The findings below are from one independent learning task.

Table 1. Independent learning task

<i>Learning task</i>
<p>Participants were required to create a learning plan that they would later use (after consultation with their advisor) to form the basis of 8 weeks of independent language learning. This plan was scaffolded through the use of written prompts but no other guidance or assistance was given. Students were given 90 minutes to complete this task.</p> <p>(This time allocation was chosen as it both mirrored the length of learning periods students were familiar with, as a class at the university where the research was undertaken lasts 90 minutes, and it provided enough time for students to engage in and complete this complex task. It also allowed for a picture of learning over a sustained period of time, something largely absent from the available literature.).</p>

It is perhaps important to note here, that although the above task is a planning task, it does not differ from other learning tasks (such as writing an essay), except in the content. Planning, rather than just an element of the learning process, also becomes the content of the learning task in this instance.

The original data set was largely in Japanese (subjects were allowed to use whatever language or languages were natural for them to complete the task, so as not to interfere with processing) and compiled from the VPA and observational notes, as all subjects were both audio and video- recorded. Analysis and coding of the data revealed 5 distinct categories of processing occurring during learning, which are defined in Table 2.

Table 2. Learning processing categories and definitions (Carson, 2012).

<i>Learning Processing categories and definitions</i>	
• Cognitive Processing	Processing when learners are engaged with understanding the content of the task or doing the task, but not with <i>how to</i> do the task
• Metacognitive Processing	Processing occurring when learners are concerned with <i>how</i> learning is proceeding and should proceed
• Processing related to affective state	When learning is interrupted or affected by the learners' emotions
• Processing related to physical state	When learning is interrupted or affected by the learners' physical state
• Off-task processing	When learning is interrupted by learners becoming distracted by either external or internal factors

Through the grounded theory process, all of these categories and definitions emerged from the data, rather than being imposed on the data. They can be considered reliable as they were developed and proved consistent (through the use of the GTM constant comparison methodology) across a much larger body of data (larger in terms of participants, and varieties of learning tasks). Perhaps the most interesting findings in relation to independent learning were the frequency of occurrence of metacognitive processing, how these frequencies ranged across different participants, and the frequencies of occurrence of the three main categories of metacognitive processing – knowledge, monitoring and control. Examples of coded verbalizations from the data are included in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Processing frequencies

In Table 3, the numbers represent the number of instances when a particular type of processing occurred, and the percentages indicate the percentage of instances of each type of processing as part of all processing. Neither the numeric instances nor the percentages are indicative of the amount of time spent on different forms of processing. For all participants, the greatest amount of time was spent on cognitive processing (though instances of cognition, and other processing categories, vary in length).

Table 3. Processing frequencies

<i>Participants</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>
Total Codes	81	76	129	80	141	97	157	188
<i>Affective State</i>	0 0%	4 5.3%	6 4.6%	3 3.8%	9 6.4%	2 2.1%	7 4.5%	2 1.1%
<i>Physical State</i>	0 0%	1 1.3%	5 3.9%	2 2.5%	2 1.4%	6 6.2%	5 3.2%	4 2.1%
<i>Off task</i>	2 2.5%	0 0%	9 7%	7 8.7%	8 5.6%	0 0%	4 2.5%	1 0.5%
<i>Cognition</i>	32 39.5%	27 35.5%	38 29.5%	24 30%	50 35.5%	36 37.1%	62 39.5%	67 35.65%
<i>Metacognitive Knowledge</i>	4 4.9%	3 4%	7 5.4%	4 5%	8 5.7%	3 3%	13 8.3%	12 6.4%
<i>Metacognitive Monitoring</i>	22 27.2%	22 28.9%	36 27.9%	21 26.2%	36 25.5%	30 31%	39 24.8%	50 26.6%
<i>Metacognitive Control</i>	21 25.9%	19 25%	28 21.7%	19 23%	28 19%	20 20%	27 17%	52 27.6%

What is immediately clear from these data is the centrality of metacognition to how subjects undertook this learning task. It accounts for over 50% of all coded instances of processing activity, for all subjects, when each category of metacognition is viewed as a distinct category of processing. However, this table shows clear differences in the number of instances of categories across the 8 participants. Looking at the total numbers of codes per participant we have the very wide range of 76-188. These numbers illustrate the number of times the subjects switched from one type of processing to another.

Yet by looking at the data in terms of the percentage of instances across categories, we can see much tighter ranges, showing patterns of processing behaviour. Looking at metacognition processing instances as a percentage of total processing instances per subject, we have a range of 51.1% - 60.65%. When we break metacognition down into its 3 main categories, we also see tighter ranges than the numeric instances would indicate as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency ranges

<i>Metacognitive Processing Ranges</i>	
<u>Metacognitive Knowledge</u> : Knowledge learners possess about how to learn that can be used to influence the learning process. This knowledge can be strategic knowledge, self knowledge or task knowledge	3% - 8.3%
<u>Metacognitive Monitoring</u> : Any judgments or queries made by learners that concern how learning is progressing, or how learning should progress	25.5% - 31%
<u>Metacognitive Control</u> : Any decisions or actions taken by learners that affect the progress of the learning task	19.9%- 27.6%

We can see that in terms of metacognitive activity, all participants engaged in similar ranges of metacognitive activity – there were not comparatively ‘highly metacognitive participants’ or participants with low metacognitive activity (although numeric instances did differ). The percentage of instances for the other categories of the learning process during this task fall in the following ranges:

Table 5. Other processing categories

<i>Other Processing Categories</i>	
Cognition	30% - 39.5%
Off task	0% - 8.7%
Affective State	0% - 6.4%
Physical State	0% - 6.2%

These percentages show that some participants (perhaps surprisingly) were able to stay entirely ‘on-task’ for 90 minutes, without becoming distracted or de-motivated.

‘In Learning’ Processing Sequences

As can be seen in the figure below (which separates metacognitive knowledge, monitoring and control), as a learner is engaged in an independent learning task, he or she moves very often between engagement with the content (cognition) to thinking about how to proceed with learning (metacognition). In looking at this processing sequence example, we can see how embedded and frequent are the metacognitive processing elements during the undertaking of an independent learning task. Moving

from left to right, the figure provides a snapshot of how an individual learner's processing occurred over a 45-minute period.

Of particular relevance is that metacognitive processing elements are consistently present throughout the learning episode. They are not more frequent where they might be expected to be concentrated – for example at the beginning or planning stage of undertaking learning, or towards then at the end, as learners evaluate if and how they have completed the task. Metacognitive processing is a consistent element throughout the independent learning task.

‘In Learning’ Processing Sequence Example (approx 45 minutes)							
	Cognition		Control		Cognition		Cognition
	Monitoring		Cognition		Monitoring		Control
	Cognition		Monitoring		Control		Cognition
	Control		Knowledge		Cognition		Monitoring
	Cognition		Control		Monitoring		Physical State
	Control		Cognition		Control		Monitoring
	Affective State		Knowledge		Monitoring		Control
	Monitoring		Cognition		Control		Monitoring
	Cognition		Control		Cognition		Cognition
	Monitoring		Cognition		Monitoring		
	Cognition		Monitoring		Control		Monitoring

Figure 1. Processing Sequence Example of an Individual Participant

Implications for Learning Advising

The findings above provide a snapshot of the complex interplay between all forms of processing occurring during learning. Densely present throughout the learning process is multi-dimensional metacognitive processing. The importance of this for learning performance is clear, and further study of the quality of this processing will provide us with more information with which to better advise our learners. This understanding of metacognition has some important implications, which are discussed below, for how advisors view this concept, how they incorporate it into their discussions with learners, and how learning advising as a field continues to research learning.

1. Metacognition is not only self-regulation, nor simply metacognitive knowledge or strategy use

The distinction between metacognition and self-regulation is very important as the conceptualizations of self-regulation do not describe a high frequency thinking activity occurring during learning, which is the type of thinking uncovered by the data in this paper and defined as metacognition. Rather, self-regulation is generally discussed as a more global control mechanism that learners use at certain intervals (Borkowski, 1996; Butterfield & Belmont, 1977; Stromso & Braten, 2010; Zimmerman, 2002). However it is also worth noting, that within the field of self-regulation, this understanding is also in dispute (Veenman, 2007). In order to understand learning processing, and as advisors seeking to facilitate more effective processing, we need to understand metacognition as a high frequency, embedded, necessary element of independent learning processing, that all learners are engaging in.

The data discussed in this paper show that conscious metacognitive knowledge occurs with much less frequency than monitoring and control. This provides advisors with three separate pieces of information. Firstly, monitoring and control decisions are highly frequent during independent learning (e.g. for the task discussed in this study, the 8 participants individually made between 19 and 52 control decisions –deciding to skip sections, allocating more time to certain questions than others, deciding to change time allocations in order to re-read when they had not fully understood a text, deciding to work on computer instead of paper, deciding the task had been sufficiently completed before the end of the time allocated, etc.). The data from this exploratory project suggest that when we discuss independent learning with advisees, rather than simply discussing the more global, self-regulatory ‘out of learning’ management (when students are planning learning, reflecting on completed learning or thinking about future learning), we also need to take time to discuss and elucidate the ‘in learning’ management (when students are engaged in learning).

Secondly, the lower frequencies of metacognitive knowledge are not indicative of any lesser importance. A learner’s ability to draw on past learning experiences and strategies can have a major impact on task performance and learning effectiveness (Bromme, Pieschl, & Stahl, 2010; Masui, 1999; Swanson, 1990; Vrugt & Oort, 2008; Wenden, 1999). As such, it may be important for advisors to more

explicitly encourage learner reflection on, and use of, their metacognitive knowledge (Cotterall & Murray, 2009).

Thirdly, if the use of metacognitive knowledge is at times unconscious, it may be useful to show students how this occurs, and provide them with examples of both positive and negative instances of this unconscious behaviour. Making this explicit and ‘conscious’ then makes the use of such knowledge available and amenable to change.

2. When independent learning occurs, metacognition necessarily occurs

It is important to distinguish between the literature on metacognition training and interventions for ‘traditional’ classroom learning (Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 1998; Hartman, 2002; Masui, 1999; Su & Reeve, 2011; Ward & Traweek, 1993) and independent learning settings. As this data set showed, it was not possible for learning to be completed without metacognitive activity. What this means is that although there is much literature on the practice of teaching interventions to encourage and increase metacognitive behaviours during learning, with regard to independent learning, we may need to change to focus of such practice. Rather than looking to ‘increase’ or ‘encourage’ such behaviours, we should look to explicitly explain and discuss these behaviours, with the goal of improving them (as often, metacognitive activity can have negative results, when knowledge, judgments and decisions are inaccurate or ineffective), not increasing them. This can be done both through a process of discovery, as put forward by Holec (1981) for the development of autonomy, but may also be dealt with through explicit discussion and explanation in advising interactions.

3. More examination is needed of ‘in learning’ time, and more interaction with students during learning

The process of co-constructing knowledge about learning between an advisor and advisee, in relation to prior and future learning, has huge value for advisees in terms of developing their independent learning ability. However, as advisors hope to encourage effective and, ultimately, optimal learning, it is important to have an accurate picture of what is occurring when the advisees are not only thinking about and analysing their learning, but also when they are engaged in learning. For example,

it is important not to limit the discussion of ‘control decisions’ to the learning planning stage or the post-evaluation stage, if these decisions are prevalent and constant during independent learning. While this paper has highlighted the degree to which metacognitive processing occurs during independent learning, how and why different learners are more or less effective with this processing is a major area of concern for advising. Broader empirical examination of the differences between learning processing during directed learning and independent learning, alongside more in-depth studies in independent learning settings, would provide learning advisors with more evidence from which to begin facilitating better learning, and a better understanding of the challenges learners face as they engage in increasingly independent complex learning.

Notes on the contributor

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Appendices

Appendix A

<i>Learning Processing categories and definitions</i>	<i>Examples for Data Set</i>
<p>Cognitive Processing: Processing when learners are engaged with understanding the content of the task or doing the task, but not with <i>how to</i> do the task</p>	<p><i>"what specific things can you focus on...I want to improve my business English skill, but then again, I'm not sure that I am going to use English for my business...I hope my future business will be selling wines, so maybe vocabulary about wine...."</i></p> <p><i>"How can I learn new words about this? Should I read some articles on the web, or just get a book or something? Maybe I should go to a bookstore to check"</i></p> <p><i>"learning style....I have no style, just study, reading books. Actually I like doing work by myself, when I need to learn something...maybe I can answer this question this way"</i></p>
<p>Processing related to affective state: When learning is interrupted or affected by the learners' emotions</p>	<p><i>"I'm bored....I wanna go and talk to someone"</i></p> <p><i>"Now I'm afraid that if I get an F in the class I can't graduate, and I can't even start working"</i></p> <p><i>"I feel I'm dumb...I'm stupid and I can't understand anything"</i></p>
<p>Processing related to physical state: When learning is interrupted or affected by the learners' physical state</p>	<p><i>"My stomach hurts....maybe I ate too much"</i></p> <p><i>"Oh I'm so sleepy now"</i></p> <p><i>"I'm too hot to stay in this room and do this"</i></p>

Appendix B

Metacognitive Processing	Examples from Data Set
<p>Metacognitive Knowledge: Knowledge learners possess about how to learn that can be used to influence the learning process. This knowledge can be strategic knowledge, self knowledge or task knowledge</p>	<p><i>"Ah, I hate learning vocabulary, but maybe I should do because I need vocabulary, my vocabulary is small"</i> <i>"Compare the letters which I write...hmmm... that would show improvement"</i> <i>"Hmm..organising anything is a big problem for me, I am not good at organizing anything"</i></p>
<p>Metacognitive Monitoring: Any judgments or queries made by learners that concern how learning is progressing, or how learning should progress</p>	<p><i>"Ah this section is going to be the most painful to do"</i> <i>"don't know if I have got all the points I need"</i> <i>"Alright, I think I am finished. Is what I have written sufficient?"</i></p>
<p>Metacognitive Control: Any decisions or actions taken by learners that affect the progress of the learning task</p>	<p><i>"Hmm I will skip this question for now and move on because I have no idea"</i> <i>"OK I will spend 45 minutes reading and 35 minutes writing"</i> <i>"I will switch from this paper version, and use the computer from now"</i></p>

Evaluating Learner Autonomy: A dynamic Model with Descriptors

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Abstract

Every autonomous learning process should entail an evaluation of the learner's competencies for autonomy. The dynamic model of learner autonomy described in this paper is a tool designed in order to support the self-assessment and evaluation of learning competencies and to help both learners and advisors to focus on relevant aspects of the learning process. The dynamic model accounts for cognitive, metacognitive, action-oriented and affective components of learner autonomy and provides descriptors of learners' attitudes, competencies and behaviors. It is dynamic in order to allow learners to focus on their own needs and goals.

The model (<http://www.sprachenzentrum.fuberlin.de/v/autonomiemodell/index.html>) has been validated in several workshops with experts at the Université Nancy 2, France and at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany and tested by students, advisors and teachers. It is currently used at the Centre for Independent Language Learning at the Freie Universität Berlin for language advising. Learners can freely choose the components they would like to assess themselves in. Their assessment is then discussed in an advising session, where the learner and the advisor can compare their perspectives, focus on single aspects of the learning process and set goals for further learning. The students' feedback gathered in my PhD investigation shows that they are able to benefit from this evaluation; their awareness, self-reflection and decision-making in the autonomous learning process improved.

Keywords: learner autonomy, self-assessment, evaluation, awareness raising, advising, self-access

What are the aims of language learning advising for learner autonomy? In my experience as director of the Centre for Independent Language Learning (CILL) at the Freie Universität Berlin and as an advisor, I am confronted with this question daily. Surely, the answers may be different in different institutional contexts, but I think most advisors would agree on this: the aims of advising are both supporting (self-directed or autonomous¹) language learning processes and helping learners to develop their competencies for learner autonomy for life-long learning. Key elements of

¹ Although the difference between autonomous language learning and self-directed language learning may be relevant in research and in some learning contexts, in this article I will mostly be using these terms synonymously. See Tassinari (2010: 122) for a discussion of the difference between self-directed language learning as referring to a mode of learning and autonomous language learning as referring to the capacity of the learner to reflect independently and control to some extent their learning process in different learning situations and contexts.

language learning advising are awareness raising, reflection and learners' empowerment (see Carette & Castillo, 2004).

But how can this be tangibly achieved? What methods and tools can be useful for it? And how can a balance be found between the focus on language learning and the focus on learning to learn? Furthermore, will varied approaches be needed for different languages or is a general approach possible?

I have reflected on these questions while setting up the CILL at the Freie Universität Berlin, and to some of these questions I have devoted my PhD project on "Learner autonomy in foreign language learning: components, competencies and strategies" (Tassinari, 2010). As a result of this research I have designed a dynamic model for learner autonomy, with descriptors for attitudes, competencies and learning behaviors. This model allows a qualitative and dynamic approach to self-assessment and to the evaluation of learner autonomy.

The aims of this paper are to describe the dynamic model and to illustrate how it can be used in language advising. I will start by briefly describing the context and the methodology of my investigation; then I will define learner autonomy and illustrate the dynamic model and the descriptors. Next I will reflect on self-assessment and evaluation of learner autonomy, and define my qualitative approach to it. After that, I shall illustrate the steps for self-assessment and evaluation as practiced in the language advising service at my university. Finally I will discuss some students' feedback on this experience and include my own reflections.

The Context and the Methodology of my Investigation

The dynamic model of learner autonomy is the result of my PhD investigation. The aims of my research were both to give a systematic and operational definition of learner autonomy and to develop a description of learners' competencies and skills (see Benson, 2001) as a tool for supporting autonomous processes in learning and teaching foreign languages in higher education contexts.

My definition of learner autonomy is based on the critical analysis of existing definitions, from Holec (1981) to Dickinson (1987) Little (1991), Littlewood (1996 and 1999) and Benson (2001), to mention just some of the most relevant ones, with the purpose of identifying both crucial components of learner autonomy and cues for the descriptions of learners' competencies, attitudes and learning behaviors.

The dynamic model and the descriptors have been developed on the basis of this definition, of descriptions of strategies, and of characteristics of autonomous learners and/or learning processes (see Tassinari, 2010, chap. 3 and 4). They have been validated in workshops and discussions with experts from the CRAPEL, Université Nancy 2 and the Language Centre of the Freie Universität Berlin. The design of the validation process was based on qualitative research approaches (see Flick, 2000 and Tassinari, 2010, chap. 6 for more details.)

Finally the dynamic model and the descriptors have been tested with students of the Freie Universität Berlin, both at the CILL and in classroom settings (see Tassinari, 2010, chap. 8).

Premises: Self-assessment and Evaluation of Learner Autonomy

In the literature there is no consensus on the question of whether the assessment of learner autonomy is possible or not (see Benson, 2010). Sheerin (1997) suggests that every autonomous learning process should begin with an assessment of the learner's disposition for and capacities of learner autonomy, in the form of, for example, an interview or a questionnaire. However, this raises questions as to what kind of assessment can take place, which criteria should be taken into account, and how it might be possible to assess learner autonomy from an external perspective.

Even if some questionnaires on learner autonomy have been designed and implemented (see Rivers, 2001 or Dixon, 2011), I do think that in autonomous learning processes there are several reasons why it is more useful to focus on self-assessment than to impose an external form of assessment. First of all, it is very difficult to assess learner autonomy from an external perspective (see Sinclair, 1999); moreover, self-assessment both of language and of learning competencies is a key strategy in autonomous learning processes, and needs to be practiced and supported within a pedagogical frame with appropriate tools and methods in order to be learned (see Kleppin, 2005). As a student in my investigation said:

“The ability to evaluate oneself is not a given, it has to be learned.”

However, self-assessment should be integrated in a more general approach to the evaluation of learner autonomy. It is necessary to clarify the difference between self-assessment and evaluation: Whereas self-assessment can be defined as the

independent judgment of the learner on their own competencies or achievements on the basis of self-determined criteria (Kleppin, 2005), evaluation can be seen as a more complex process of reflection on the learning process and its results, involving both learners and teachers or advisors. Dam and Legenhausen define evaluation as follows:

“Evaluation implies that learners and teachers reflect on the experience gained in language learning and teaching, which will lead to awareness raising and prepare the ground for decision making.” (Dam & Legenhausen, 2010, p. 121)

Self-assessment is therefore meant to be part of the evaluation process, i.e. of the pedagogical and formative process which takes place – or should take place – in supporting autonomous learning processes. The key elements of evaluation – reflecting, awareness raising and preparing the ground for decision making – are also key elements in language advising (see Carette & Castillo, 2004).

Looked at that way, the evaluation of learner autonomy brings several advantages. For the learner it brings reflection on and an awareness of one’s own competencies, and can therefore contribute to improving and regulating their learning process. For the advisor it helps them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the learner and to spot areas in which support is needed.

In the next sections I will describe how the dynamic model and the descriptors can help to support this process.

The Dynamic Model and the Descriptors for Learner Autonomy

Before I illustrate the dynamic model, I shall briefly define learner autonomy.² Learner autonomy is the metacapacity, i.e. the second order capacity, of the learner to take control of their learning process to different extents and in different ways according to the learning situation. Learner autonomy is a complex construct, a

² This definition results from the critical analysis of existing definitions, which elicited core aspects of learner autonomy, components of learner autonomy, contextual aspects and possible degrees in learner autonomy (for more references see Tassinari, 2010, chap. 3; Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987; Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1996 and 1999; Benson, 2001; Oxford, 2003; Martinez, 2008). The following definition focuses on learners’ general competencies in different learning contexts and situations.

construct of constructs, entailing various dimensions and components. Essential components of learner autonomy are:

- a cognitive and metacognitive component (cognitive and metacognitive knowledge, awareness, learners' beliefs);
- an affective and a motivational component (feelings, emotions, willingness, motivation);
- an action-oriented component (skills, learning behaviors, decisions);
- a social component (learning and negotiating learning with partners, advisors, teachers...).

An essential characteristic of learner autonomy is the capacity of the learner to activate an interaction and a balance among these dimensions in different learning contexts and situations.

The dynamic model of learner autonomy

The dynamic model of learner autonomy sums up these components in terms of learners' competencies, skills, choices, and decision-making processes, and accounts for their mutual relationships (see Figure 1). In addition, 'can-do' statements describe in detail learner's competencies, skills, and behaviors (see Figure 2, 3 and 4 for some examples).

The components of the dynamic model are spheres of competencies, skills, and actions. They are expressed by verbs, in order to focus on their action-oriented and process-oriented character: 'structuring knowledge', 'dealing with my feelings', 'motivating myself', 'planning', 'choosing materials and methods', 'completing tasks', 'monitoring', 'evaluating', 'cooperating' and 'managing my own learning'.

There is no hierarchy among these components, except for 'managing my own learning', which summarizes all other components and superordinates them, therefore delivering a general overview of the complex construct of learner autonomy.

This model is both structurally and functionally dynamic. It is structurally dynamic, because each component is directly related to all the others (as shown by the arrows in Figure 1). It is functionally dynamic, because learners can decide to enter the model from any component and move freely from one component to another without following a given path, according to their needs and purposes. They can, for example, start with 'planning' if they would like to focus on this aspect of the

learning process, and then move to ‘evaluating’, or to ‘motivating myself’ or to any other component they want to reflect on. This dynamic is an essential characteristic of the model, and makes it possible to account for the complexity of learner autonomy.

On the internet version of the dynamic model the interrelationships among the components and/or the descriptors are represented by hyper-textual links (see www.sprachenzentrum.fu-berlin.de/v/autonomiemodell).

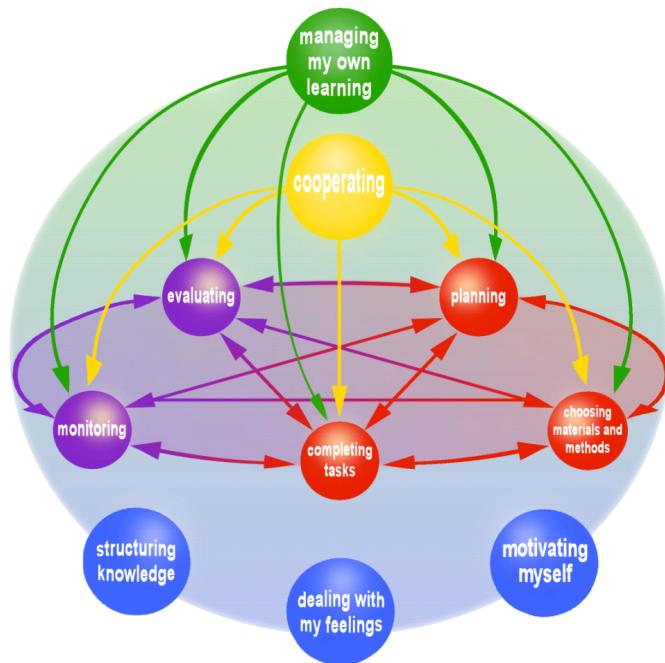


Figure 1. The dynamic model of learner autonomy (Tassinari, 2010, p. 203)

Three dimensions can be identified in the dynamic model: a predominantly action-oriented dimension (‘planning’, ‘choosing materials and methods’, ‘completing tasks’, ‘monitoring’, ‘evaluating’, ‘cooperating’, ‘managing my own learning’), a predominantly cognitive and metacognitive dimension (‘structuring knowledge’), and a predominantly affective and motivational dimension (‘dealing with my feelings’, ‘motivating myself’). In addition, a social dimension (‘cooperating’) is integrated into each component.

However, a distinction between these dimensions is merely theoretical. In learning and teaching processes, all these aspects are closely interrelated. Decision-making about one’s own learning involves cognitive aspects (e.g. knowing about alternatives), metacognitive aspects (evaluating each alternative), affective aspects (considering one’s own interests and motivation); carrying out learning tasks involves an action-oriented, a cognitive, a metacognitive and an affective dimension (being

able to achieve a task, to activate the knowledge requested by the task, to reflect on this, to take into account one's own feelings). Nevertheless, this distinction is useful for empirical and pedagogic purposes, since it makes it possible to break down this complex metacapacity into different competencies and groups of skills and strategies, so that learners and advisors can better reflect on them and enhance them in concrete learning situations.

The descriptors

Each component of the dynamic model entails a set of descriptors which give specific statements of individual competencies, skills and learning behaviors of learners. They are formulated as 'can-do' statements and they are distinguished in macro-descriptors – general descriptions which serve for an initial orientation of the learner in the self-evaluation process – and micro-descriptors, more detailed descriptions through which the learner can differentiate their skills, behaviors, and attitudes, and thus assess their learning more precisely. Together, the descriptors (118 in total, with 33 macro-descriptors and 85 micro-descriptors) constitute a checklist which covers the main areas of autonomous language learning. Some examples of descriptors are shown in Figure 2, 3 and 4. The complete checklists are available online.

Autonomy Model

Getting started
Self-assessment guidelines
Motivating myself
Dealing with my feelings
Planning
Choosing materials and methods
Completing tasks
Monitoring
Evaluating
Cooperating
Managing my own learning
Structuring knowledge
Contact

Dynamic autonomy model with descriptors » **Planning**

Planning

Planning is a key part of autonomous learning: to recognise one's own needs, to formulate these into realistic learning objectives, and to structure these into steps and create a learning plan. To plan, one has to be flexible enough to change the learning plan if one's situation or needs should change.

Show Details

I can evaluate my own language competencies.

I can analyse my own needs.

I can set myself goals.

I can plan a time and place for my learning.

I know what I need to complete a task or to achieve a goal (for example the competencies, steps of a task and language tools).

I can put together a learning plan.

If you want to add further descriptors yourself, you can do so here.

For planning in terms of learning materials and methods see [choosing materials and methods](#). Do you like learning together with others? In that case, go to [cooperating](#).

Figure 2. Some examples of macro-descriptors: planning
(<http://www.sprachenzentrum.fu-berlin.de/en/v/autonomiemodell/planen/index.html>)

In order to make the description manageable in different learning situations (e.g. in classroom learning, in self-directed learning, in informal learning), the descriptors do not refer to specific situations or to specific languages. However, even if they are not contextually bound, they are formulated for and tested within the context of language learning in higher education.

These descriptors are not intended to be exhaustive nor to be normative. They do, however, offer a wide spectrum of competences in order to serve as a tool for raising learners' (and advisors') awareness of what could be worth focusing on in autonomous learning processes.

Unlike descriptors for language skills, these descriptors are not scaled, since there is no consensus in the researching community on levels of learner autonomy. However, micro-descriptors offer some differentiation (see the examples for 'planning' and 'monitoring' in Figure 3 and 4) in order to account for diverse or partial competences and/or for different learning styles.

I can evaluate my own language competencies.



I can analyse my own needs.



I can set myself goals.



I can set myself goals (what I want to learn, for example, I want to be able to start a conversation, keep it going and finish it)

	I can do this	I want to learn this	This isn't important for me
I can set myself goals (what I want to learn, for example, I want to be able to start a conversation, keep it going and finish it)			
on my own			
together with others			
with the help of checklists or learning tips			
with a learning advisor.			
I can set myself goals while bearing in mind			
my needs			
my language competencies			
the conditions I have to work within (for example, the time available).			
I can prioritise my goals.			

on my own

together with others

with the help of checklists or learning tips

with a learning advisor.

I can set myself goals while bearing in mind

my needs

my language competencies

the conditions I have to work within (for example, the time available).

I can prioritise my goals.

Tools for a time and place for self-learning



Figure 3. Some examples of micro-descriptors: planning
(<http://www.sprachenzentrum.fu-berlin.de/en/v/autonomiemodell/planen/index.html>)

Monitoring

Monitoring means reflecting on topics, tasks, the learning process, and thinking about oneself as a learner. This enables one to identify one's own learning strengths and weaknesses and to structure one's learning accordingly.

[Show Details](#) 

I can recognise my strengths and weaknesses as a learner and/or reflect on these. 

	I can do this	I want to learn this	This isn't important for me
I can recognise my own learning style (for example, whether I am a visual or auditory learner, whether I am a perfectionist or a risk taker) and/or reflect on this.			
I can recognise my learning strategies (for example, whether I am a deductive thinker, associate words, can see the global picture) and/or reflect on them.			
I am aware of my motivation for learning and/or can reflect on this.			
I am aware of my feelings when learning and/or can reflect on them.			

For further descriptors see [motivating myself](#) and [dealing with my feelings](#).

I can recognise what prevents me from completing a task. 

I can reflect on materials and resources which I have used. 

Figure 4. Some examples of descriptors: monitoring (<http://www.sprachenzentrum.fu-berlin.de/en/v/autonomiemodell/planen/index.html>)

Steps for Self-assessment and Evaluation

A prerequisite for the evaluation of learner autonomy is the willingness of the learner to undertake it. Experience shows that it is advisable to propose, rather than impose self-reflection (see for example the feedback of student M.M. in Tassinari, 2010). Learners are different; whereas some ask for a systematic approach and a reflection on their own current status before starting a learning process, others just want to start learning. In addition, some learners are willing to focus on their own learning competencies while others prefer to focus on actually learning the language. The decision whether, when and to what extent this evaluation can be done, should be made by the learner; the advisor can/should merely support it.

In the following, I shall briefly describe the steps of this evaluation process, which I have defined during my investigation and I still adopt in the language advising service at the CILL at my university.

Getting started

The first step in the evaluation process is eliciting the learners' previous experience with autonomous language learning and their beliefs. Therefore, learners are asked to briefly describe their perceptions of autonomous language learning and their experience in this field. If learners already have some experience then they can describe its nature, strengths and shortcomings. This reflection can be done either by the learners themselves before the advising session with the help of the questions in the 'Getting started' section (<http://www.sprachenzentrum.fu-berlin.de/en/v/autonomiemodell/einstieg/index.html>), or together with the advisor during the advising session.

In the advising session it can be very constructive in any case to devote a few minutes to this topic, so that both the learner and the advisor can ask questions, if need be.

Moreover, my experience shows that recalling previous learning experiences can be very useful both for the learner and the advisor. Learners can reflect on positive and effective learning situations, tasks or strategies they have already experienced; the advisor can obtain useful information from this in order to ask questions, to make careful suggestions and to generally support the learners in their learning process.

Choosing components and descriptors

For the reflection process to be successful it is crucial that learners decide for themselves what aspects of their learning process they would like to reflect on. According to their priorities, needs, goals or interests, they can choose either one or more components. For each component they can pick the descriptors they find relevant for their learning process. This freedom to choose the component(s) and/or the descriptors is a first step in raising awareness about the learning process, because, by choosing these learners have to explicitly reflect on which aspects they want to focus on at the very moment of the self-assessment, and therefore become aware of these aspects.

Assessing one's own competences

Coming to the self-assessment itself, learners can tick for each descriptor one of three different answers (see Figure 3 and 4): 'I can', 'I want to learn this', or 'This isn't important for me'. In addition, they can use some blank lines at the end of each component in order to formulate their own descriptors, if they wish.

Learners can undertake this self-assessment alone, outside the advising session, in a familiar environment helping them to feel more comfortable and giving them more time to reflect. Once this step has been concluded, the results can be discussed with the advisor.

Comparing perspectives

The next step in the evaluation process is to discuss the learner's self-assessment with the advisor. This session is the core of the evaluation process and is a pedagogical dialogue, which allows both the learner and the advisor to reflect together by comparing each other's perspectives on the learner's competences and on the learning process.

This dialogue is conducted following the basic rules of advising: the advisor listens to the learner, asks questions for clarification, asks for details, reformulates the learner's statements, sums up, helps them focus on priorities, and asks for next steps (see Kelly, 1996).

This dialogue is crucial for the evaluation, because, as was noticed above (see Premises: self-assessment and evaluation of learner autonomy), experience shows that self-assessment is very challenging, not only in language learning, but also in many other fields. If left to their own devices, learners often tend to overestimate or to underestimate themselves (see Kleppin, 2005). Moreover, they find it more difficult to define criteria for assessing their own competencies in different situations.

The descriptors offer learners a first opportunity to let their inner perspective interact with an external perspective on autonomous language learning. But it is in a real dialogue between the learner and the advisor – or the learner and the teacher, or the learner and their co-learners – that this interaction can really unleash its potential for the evaluation process.

Both my investigation and my experience as a language advisor show that advising sessions following a learner's self-assessment are very fruitful (Tassinari,

2010). Learners generally appreciate the fact that they can reflect deeply and free from constraints on themselves as learners; they independently initiate topics for discussion, they obtain new insights into their learning competencies and attitudes, they become more aware of their learning choices and are able to make decisions for themselves regarding their future learning.

Making decisions for further learning

At the end of the evaluation process learners should be able to make decisions for further learning. For instance, they should be able to decide to try new tasks or new strategies, to join a learning group or to look for a tandem partner. They may also decide to leave the course they are enrolled in, in order to work more directly on their specific needs. This capacity for making reflected decisions (Holec, 1981) is both one of the aims and the result of the evaluation process.

This point should be emphasized because this evaluation, both as a qualitative and a formative evaluation, and the learner's awareness of their learning process activate metacognition and constitute therefore a crucial aspect in the autonomous learning process.³

Of course, this evaluation process is recursive: it can be started more than once at different moments in the learning process, each time with a different focus and with different outcomes. This is why the proposed model of learner autonomy is dynamic; each learner at different moments of their autonomous learning process should find some stimuli there for reflecting on their own learning.

A Qualitative and Dynamic Approach to Self-assessment and Evaluation of Learner Autonomy

This autonomy model allows a qualitative approach to the evaluation of learner autonomy, not a quantitative one: meaning the descriptors are not provided with a numeric answer system, for various reasons.

First of all, giving a numeric score to the different answers would imply a hierarchy among the components and the descriptors. This would severely compromise the learner's ability to freely choose the components and the descriptors

³ For the importance of metacognition in autonomous language learning see Wenden, 1991 and 1999 and Benson, 2001: 86–98.

they would like to reflect on. Moreover, a scored test is not advisable from a pedagogical point of view, since it could give learners the false impression that there is a full score to reach. On the contrary, the aim of this evaluation is not to measure learner autonomy, but rather to enhance the awareness of and the reflection on one's own strategies and learning process.

On the way to learner autonomy there is no full score to reach. There are many ways to go and each learner can find their own way according to their needs, priorities, attitudes and personal experience.

The Students' Feedback

The majority of the students who took part in my inquiry (see Tassinari, 2010, chap. 8) gave me positive feedback on the self-assessment with the dynamic model. Many of them stressed the fact that the self-assessment gave them impetus for self-reflection, increased their awareness of their own learning processes and helped them to focus on goals in order to improve their learning. Some students additionally stressed that the dynamic model and the descriptors gave them an overview of different opportunities, forms, methods, and strategies for autonomous language learning.

The following quotes from the student feedback interviews illustrate these effects of self-assessment:

“I found the checklists very important for self-reflection. [...] This self-reflection is something very important [for learner autonomy MGT]. [...] Descriptors are very good for becoming aware of problems (...) that one has with autonomous language learning.”

“[The descriptors] allow you to understand which things you prioritize when [...] learning a language autonomously, and allow you to understand how many opportunities you can exploit and which opportunities you actually exploit and which you do not, what can be improved and... as for many things, if I have only my own point of view, maybe I am only able to see certain things. [...] It's a test that, ... since it has no grade, one can do it freely and it allows you to realize your own pros and contras...”

This feedback has been confirmed by many other students I have advised since the end of my investigation.

Among the difficulties students identified in their autonomous learning process are discontinuous motivation, self-assessment of language skills, the choice of suitable materials, planning, and time management. Since the investigation was run on a small scale, it is not advisable to draw too general conclusions from these remarks. Nevertheless, the topics addressed seem to be crucial aspects of autonomous learning processes and are surely worthy of further investigation.

Conclusion

The results of my investigation show that the self-assessment and the evaluation of the learners' competencies, attitudes and behaviors in an autonomous learning process are very useful both for learners and advisors in order to reflect and to regulate the learning process itself. The dynamic model and the descriptors are a valid tool in order to support this evaluation process, to foster awareness, reflection and decision-making.

Nevertheless, the evaluation process should be integrated within a pedagogical dialogue, allowing the learner to compare their perspective with that of the advisor and/or of their peers. Within a pedagogical frame explicitly aiming at learner autonomy, it is therefore the task of the advisor to create settings and practices that enhance this reflection, while taking into account the learner's needs and attitudes.

Notes on the contributor

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The Degree of Directiveness in Written Advising: A Preliminary Investigation

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Abstract

In this paper, the researchers analyse written discursive devices that learning advisors (LAs) at their institution use in order to give input to learners on their self-directed work. The researchers analysed written advising approaches by seven LAs throughout an eight-week period and coded the discursive devices according to their degree of directiveness. The results of the research indicate that LAs draw on a range of discursive devices and use varying degrees of directiveness when addressing the needs and learning stage of the students. The results have implications for LA training at the authors' institution.

Keywords: advising, self-directed learning, written feedback, discursive devices

The field of Advising in Language Learning (ALL) is a developing area of applied linguistics and is in the process of establishing its own discourses and practices (Carson & Mynard, forthcoming). This paper has two main aims; (1) to add to the body of knowledge of advising discourse and practice, and (2) to understand more about the nature of written advising practices. Learning advisors (LAs), particularly ones new to the field, often experience difficulties knowing the appropriate approach to take when advising learners and how directive a stance to take during the advising process. A directive stance is one where an advisor or counselor intervenes in an obtrusive way. More research is needed in this area and the present study attempts to understand current practices at the authors' institution in relation to the degree of directiveness adopted by LAs during the written advising process. The findings will provide insights for new and ongoing LA training.

Literature Review

Counselling and advising in language learning

ALL draws on a variety of fields which inform research and practice. The two main areas of professional practice which learning advisors draw upon are language teaching and professional counselling. There are variations in theoretical underpinnings that guide approaches to counselling (Nelson, 2008) and the approach

most drawn upon in ALL is person-centred counselling which was established by Carl Rogers. The three underlying goals of this kind of counselling are respect, empathy and genuineness (Egan, 1994; Mozzon-McPherson, forthcoming; Rogers, 1951). Person-centred counsellors aim to develop and maintain effective self-concept (Colledge, 2002), personal fulfilment and self-actualisation. Other schools of counselling are not often referred to in ALL, but there may be merit in drawing on other approaches to counselling, in addition to other kinds of professional advising and coaching (Carson & Mynard, forthcoming).

Degrees of directiveness

Person-centred counselling is generally non-directive and counsellors adopt an unobtrusive role. Other forms of counselling such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) may involve more obtrusive interventions or advice-giving. Although many mainstream schools of counselling are largely non-directive, tensions have existed in specialized counselling fields and an examination of the discourse reveals that counsellors do actually give advice – albeit in subtle ways. For example in the specialist field of HIV counselling, counsellors were found to combine non-directive counselling practices with advice giving (Silverman, 1997). Similarly, in family planning counselling, counsellors were found to be skilfully negotiating issues related to health and family planning with clients (Candlin & Lucas, 1986). The counsellors seemed to instinctively know at what point along a continuum of directiveness to pitch their advice. The practice of alluding to advice without explicitly offering it is another subtle intervention technique in general counselling (Maynard, 1991). Furthermore, Feltham (1995) notes that features such as persuading and influencing in a non-directive way can also be used in counselling sessions.

Aims of ALL

LAs are usually trained language teachers with experience and knowledge that could be of great benefit to learners who are beginning to plan their own self-directed learning. Whereas the overall aim of ALL is to promote language learner autonomy (Carson & Mynard, forthcoming), the LA has to negotiate the difficult task of deciding when to provide input and suggestions and when to wait for a learner to discover certain connections by themselves. Allowing the learner opportunities for

experimentation and reflection may increase the likelihood of a learner assuming a greater degree of control of the learning process.

Supporting self-directed learning

The self-directed learning modules used at the researchers' institution have been described in more detail elsewhere (Mynard, 2010; Noguchi & McCarthy, 2010; Yamaguchi et al, forthcoming) so will not be discussed at length in this paper. The modules are optional, self-directed courses of work offered at the self-access learning centre (for a description of the self-access centre, see Cooker, 2010). There are a variety of module types available to all students at the university, but the current research focuses on a module offered to freshman students in their second semester called "Learning how to Learn" or LHL. At the beginning of the module, learners are assigned an LA who helps them to set goals and to plan and implement an appropriate course of self-study. The modules are referred to as "module packs" and are physical folders containing a learning plan and blank pages for documentation and reflection. The learners may include examples of their work in these packs. Each week, learners undertake self-directed independent work and submit weekly summaries and reflections on their work to their assigned LAs. LAs comment on the students' work and reflections each week during the eight week period and also meet the learners individually twice during that time.

Written advising

The aim of written advising is to promote deeper-level reflection on the language-learning process (Mynard, 2010) and to guide the learner towards following a more effective plan which ultimately results in linguistic gain (for a discussion of the benefits of written advising see Mynard and Navarro (2010) and Thornton & Mynard, (forthcoming)).

In a previous research study which analysed written advising contained in the LHL module packs of thirty learners at the same institution, the results (displayed in Table 1) showed that a range of discursive devices were used by LAs during the eight week period (Mynard, 2010, pp. 616-617). The second part of this study attempted to identify the written discursive devices that the learners felt most benefited their self-directed learning by asking learners to highlight the most beneficial written comments from their learning advisors after the module had finished. Analysis of the results

indicated that a range of discursive devices were useful for their learning and no comment type was shown to be more beneficial than others. What appeared to be more important for the learners was that the LAs were targeting their written advising specifically to the learners' needs and self-directed work (see Mynard, 2012 for details of the second part of the study).

Table 1. An analysis of written discursive devices adopted by LAs

Theme 1: Probing		
Questioning	552	
Short question	80	
Will and future questions	58	
Indirect question	11	
Total	701	34%

Theme 2: Commenting		
Giving feedback	302	
Justification	39	
Giving an opinion	2	
Total	343	17%

Theme 3: Attending		
Acknowledging	57	
Restating	102	
Intuiting	69	
Contradicting	47	
Agreeing	30	
Total	305	15%

As can be seen in Table 1, LAs use a range of discursive devices in response to learners' work. However, the focus of the present research into the degree of directiveness of written advising was inspired by the results of Mynard's (2010) study which indicated that 15% of the discursive devices were categorized as "giving input."

The Present Research

For this study, the researchers drew on the same data set as above, but were interested in a more in-depth analysis of the ways in which LAs actually gave input to learners. As a result, the following research question was created:

How do LAs give directive and non-directive written input to learners on language learning methods, strategies and planning?

Whereas in the previous study, thirty learner module packs were analysed from the eight-week program, for the present study just seven module packs from the previous study were used in order to make the research manageable. One pack from each LA involved in the previous study was selected at random to ensure that each LA was represented in the data analysis, but individual styles are not taken into account. In fact, different approaches to advising may be taken by the same LA at different times depending on the needs of a particular learner. However, the intention of the present study is not to examine differences in advising styles. Rather, the purpose is to conduct a closer analysis of the written discursive devices in order to understand the degree of directiveness the team of LAs adhere to when providing input to learners on planning and implementing an individualized self-directed learning plan.

All of the handwritten comments made by the learning advisors had already been transcribed for the previous research and the seven selected module packs were completely reanalysed for the present research using a piece of qualitative analysis software called HyperRESEARCH. HyperRESEARCH enables items to be easily coded manually on text files by researchers. The software allows researchers to see items grouped by code - either as a list, or in context - in order to aid analysis.

Although discursive devices written for purposes other than giving input were discounted from the data, the authors would like to note here that the comments made by the LAs served a variety of purposes, not just giving input (see Table 1). For example, there were many cases where LAs wrote comments which sought clarification, summarized the work so far, attempted to motivate or encourage the learner or aimed to help the learner think more deeply about the learning process in general.

Data Analysis

Only the items in the data which were identified as serving the purpose of “giving input” were chosen for analysis and there were 161 instances of “giving input” altogether in the seven packs. Instances of “giving input” and possible emergent themes were discussed by the two researchers until ten codes were agreed

upon. The codes were then classified as either “directive advising” or “less-directive advising” through a process of discussion and detailed examination of the data. Table 2 shows the discursive devices which the researchers classified as directive advising. Table 3 contains the discursive devices coded as less-directive advising.

Table 2. Discursive devices coded as “directive advising”

Code	Purpose	Example from the data
1. Directive	LA notices an important point and tells the learner what to do	“You must make sure that when you speak to practice grammar items that you try to use the grammar items you were studying”
2. Strong suggestions	LA gives a concrete example of a study material, direction or strategy often using “you should...”	“you should think about how you can evaluate your overall progress in this module”

Table 3. Discursive devices coded as “less-directive advising”

Code	Purpose	Example from the data
3. Prompting further reflection (PFR)	LA wants to highlight an important issue and see if the learner can identify a problem, connection, study material or strategy by themselves	“Are the sentences you are using for shadowing really useful for your speaking skill?”
4. Conditional language	LA provides examples of activities, materials and possible outcomes using conditional language “if...”	“If you talked about the same topic with another teacher, you might hear similar vocabulary”
5. Mild suggestions	LA uses expressions such as “maybe you could...” and “you might want to...” in order to give suggestions, but transmits the message that the learner should be the one to decide the best course of action. (This kind of alluding technique is similar to that in counselling noted earlier by Feltham (1995).)	“I think it’s a good idea to review this week”
6. Expert opinion	LA explains in general terms why something is effective or not effective.	“Learning vocabulary for the sake of learning vocabulary is not very effective”
7. Intuiting	LA makes guesses based on	“You didn’t write clearly in

	available information and reflects the issue back to the learner.	your learning plan but it seems you want to focus on improving your speaking skills and vocabulary skills for now”
8. Restating	LA paraphrases what the learner has written about or done in order to highlight it. In written form, this is almost always followed by another discursive device. Together the two devices provide input relevant to the learner.	“You mentioned that one of the worksheets was too easy” (followed by “so you might want to challenge yourself with something more difficult”)
9. Reinforcing	LA paraphrases the learner or describes what he/she has done and provides positive feedback letting the learner know that he/she is on track.	“I think that is a good strategy to try to explain the words you learned in your own words.”
10. Reorienting	LA paraphrases the learner or describes what he/she has done, but the message is clear that the learner should choose another approach.	⁴ No occurrences in the present data set. General example: “So, you decided to work on your pronunciation skills this week. Don’t forget that your goal is listening”

During the initial coding stage, the “expert opinion” code was assumed to be a directive device. However, on closer examination of entire segments of text, this code was found to be a more subtle intervention device similar to the one described by Maynard (1991). The LA makes a general comment about good cognitive strategies or ways to organise self-directed work, but the learner can choose whether or not to adopt it.

Results

Before examining some of the discourse more closely in context, it is useful to see some broad trends. Figure 1 shows the number of times that the LAs (collectively) adopted the written typologies described in tables 2 and 3 in the eight-week period, although there was variation between the individual LAs regarding the extent to which they used the various discursive devices for giving input.

⁴ Although no occurrences of this code were found in the present data set, the authors have included it here for two reasons: (1) it occurred in an noticeable number of packs not included in the data set (2) it emphasizes the contrastive role of the preceding discursive device, i.e. “Reinforcing” provides feedback to the learners that they are following an effective course of action; “Reorienting” provides feedback which suggests that a learner is not following an effective course of action.

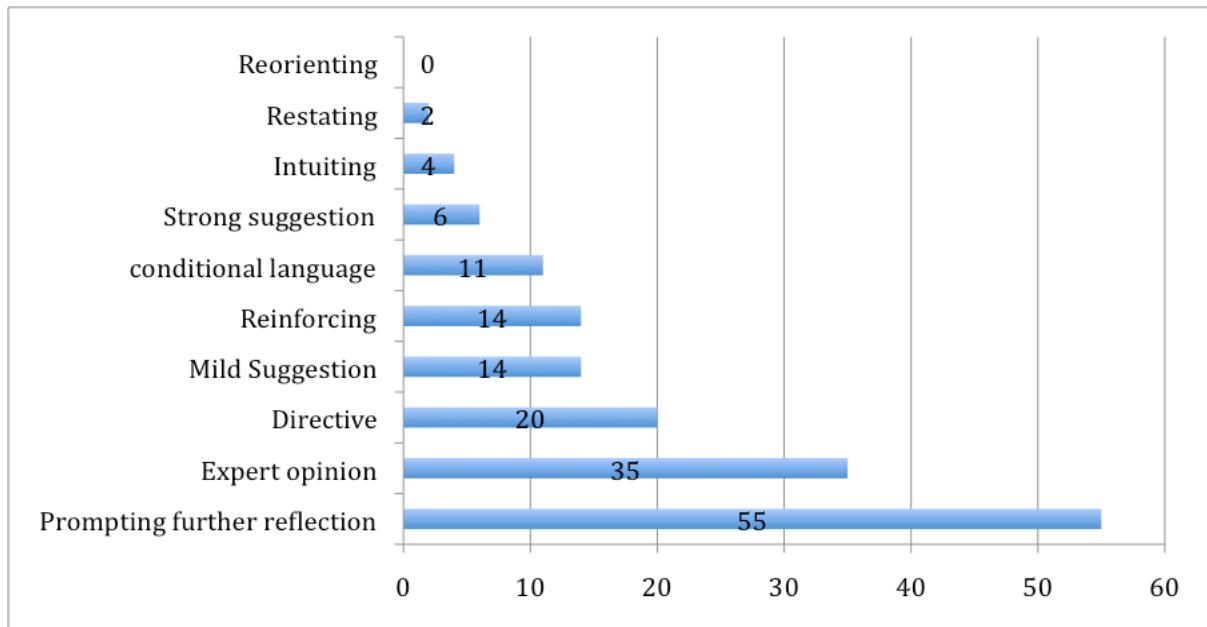


Figure 1: The total number of times LAs adopted the different written discursive devices

The following section will provide snapshot details of the three most heavily used devices followed by a more in-depth look at the data by presenting actual extracts and their respective codes.

Prompting further reflection (PFR)

Prompting further reflection (PFR) was the most frequently used device for giving input to learners. Figure 2 shows the number of times in which the individual LAs used PFR by asking questions with the specific purpose of giving indirect input throughout the eight-week period.

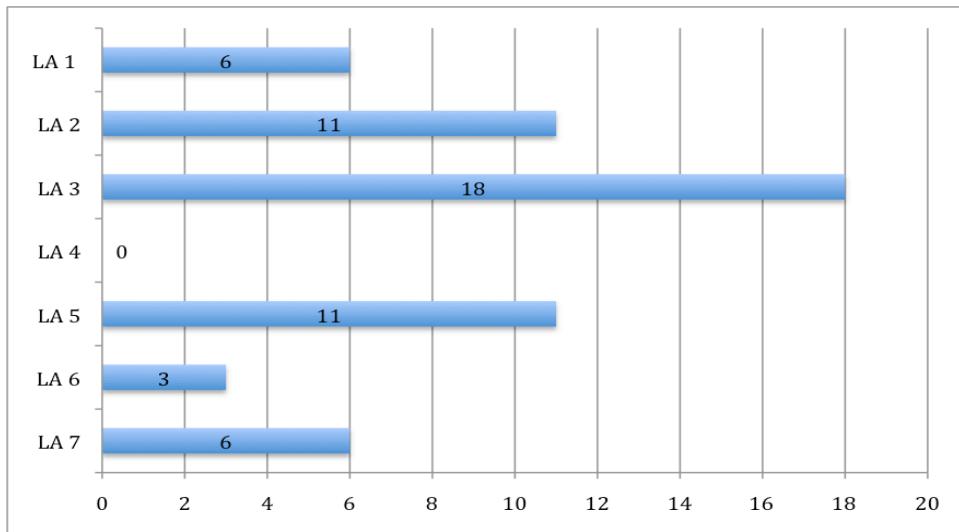


Figure 2. The total number of times each LA used PFR for giving written input

All but one of the LAs used PFR as a discursive device in order to give input. The extracts presented later in the paper give examples of how PFR is used in context.

Expert opinion

All of the LAs gave an “expert opinion” at least once in the eight-week period and this is shown in Figure 3.

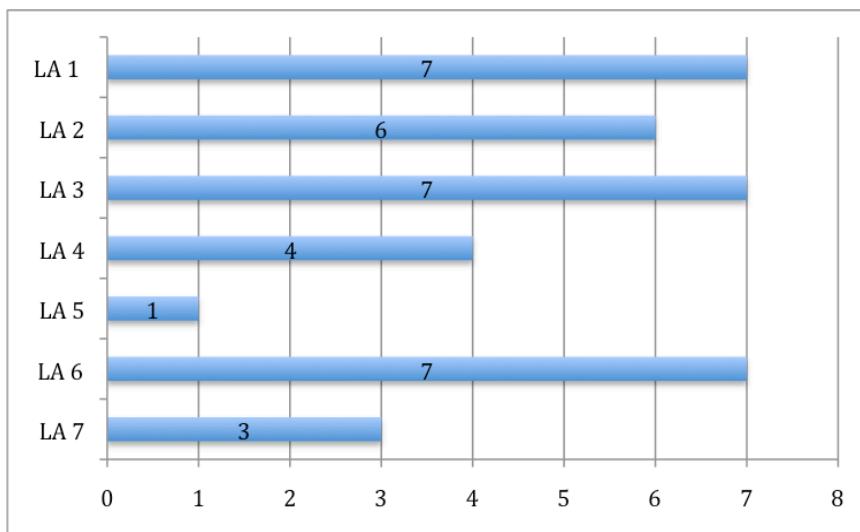


Figure 3. The total number of times each LA gave an expert opinion as a device for giving input

Extracts 4 and 5 presented later in the paper show how expert opinions were introduced as a non-directive discursive device in context.

Directives

All but one LA used at least one directive as a way of giving input to a learner as can be seen in Figure 4.

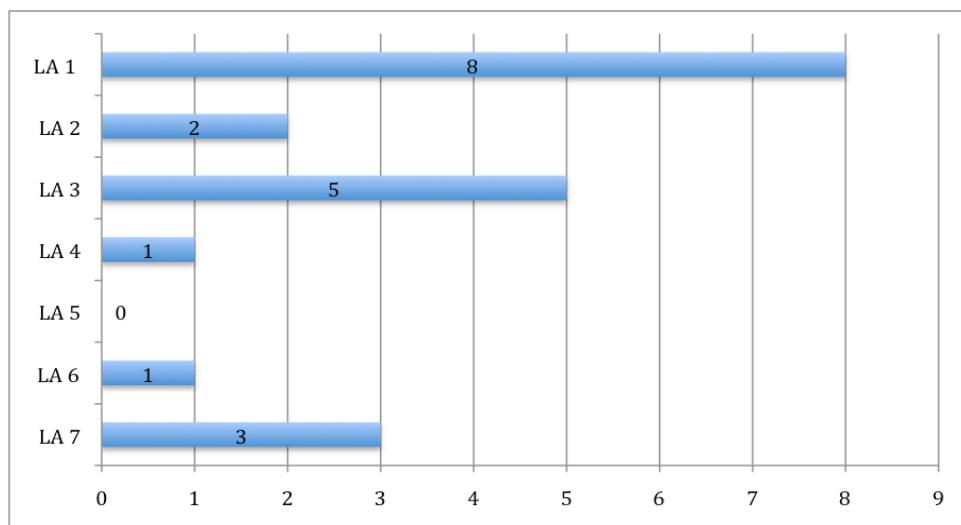


Figure 4. The total number of times each LA used a directive as a device for giving input

Extract 5 written by LA 1 examined later in the paper shows an example of a directive being used in context.

Analysis of the discourse

By examining whole segments of comments written by LAs in context, the researchers were able to see how an LA responded to a learner's self-directed work by drawing on a range of discursive devices. The following example extracts were chosen because they show a variety of the discursive devices being used concurrently.

Extract 1 (LA 2)

Extract 1 is from a longer written segment by LA 2. The learner was working on improving English conversation skills and had described how she had recorded her conversation with a partner in order to later notice problematic areas in her speaking skills during the conversation. The student had noticed that the conversation was one-sided. From her side there was a lot of silence or one-word responses to the interlocutor. In the module pack, the learner wrote about her idea to prepare topics in advance for the next time.

		Code
1	I'm glad that recording and listening to your conversation helped you find some of your weak areas. What kind of study activities do you think would help you improve? Silences? One word answers?	PFR
4	Do you know good phrases for filling silences and giving your opinion?	PFR
5	How could you study pronunciation with those kind of phrases?	PFR
6	I think you're right that it's a good idea to plan your topic for your conversation in advance. Good luck at the practice centre.	Reinforcing
7		

In Extract 1, the LA writes a series of questions in order to prompt further reflection (lines 1 to 5). The LA then finishes the thread by providing some reinforcement and encouragement to the learner to reassure her that she is doing well (lines 6 and 7).

Extract 2 (LA 3)

This extract is the written response by the LA to the learner who had written detailed notes about her study plan, but her study approach did not involve trying to use the new words in her speaking practice (which was her goal).

		Code
1	you did some good work this week. I'm impressed with the reflection on your study activities and your progress.	Reinforcing
3	You seem to be learning a lot of new words each week – are these words you are interested in or related to topics you want to talk about?	Intuiting
5	Also, you seem to be doing a lot of studying and inputting information - learning a lot of vocabulary – is there anything else you think you could do with the new words you learn?	PFR
6		Intuiting
7		PFR

The LA begins with some encouraging words and writes a reinforcing comment on something that the learner did particularly well (lines 1 and 2). The LA intuits that the learner is learning a lot of new words each week. The assumption here is that the LA thinks that the learner may be learning too many new words, but uses an indirect way of expressing this and asks a question to encourage the learner to reflect on whether the words are useful (line 3). The LA follows up by intuiting that the learner may need to shift the balance from studying new language to actually using the new words (line 5). The LA then asks a question in order to encourage the learner to reflect on how the words could be used (lines 6-7).

Extract 3 (LA 5)

The following extract is from an LA on a learner's first week of self-directed work. The learner's work was rather unstructured and he had only just begun to locate and experiment with using different strategies and resources.

		Code
1	You have made an excellent start – well done! I have a few questions.	
2	Did you learn expressions you need?	PFR
3	How can you make sure the book (or DVD) is right for you?	PFR
4	Can you use these expressions in a real situation?	PFR
5	Are you making a note of new expressions or words?	PFR
6	How can you make sure you remember them?	PFR
7	I was interested to hear how you moved your mouth on the train.	Restating
8	Did this help you?	PFR

This extract begins with an encouraging comment from the LA (line 1). Next, the LA asks a series of questions (lines 2-6). The implication behind these questions are that the LA thinks that the learner may not be choosing appropriate vocabulary, is not using appropriate resources and is giving no indication that he is attempting to keep records or review the new words. However, instead of pointing out these deficiencies, the LA asks questions to encourage the learner to come to these conclusions for himself. The LA then refers to an activity that the learner has done well (line 7). Finally, the LA follows this up with a question in order to encourage the learner to think more deeply about the activity (line 8).

Extract 4 (LA 6)

In this extract, the learner wrote very detailed notes and seems to be a fairly aware, independent learner who is on the right track with her self-directed learning. The learner is focussing on improving listening skills.

		Code
1	You started very well. Well done!	
2	I see that you went to the practice center for listening practice.	Restating
3	It's too bad you forgot to turn on the recorder! ☺ That's a little funny!	
4	You said that you did not get much listening practice because the teacher	Restating
5	waited for you to speak. What will you change next time for the session	PFR
6	to go better?	
7	I'm glad you find the SALC listening sheets useful.	Reinforcing
8	They will help you to build your confidence!	Expert opinion
9	Finally, I am happy that you reviewed new words.	Reinforcing
10	This will help you to remember the vocabulary better.	Expert opinion

As this learner appears to be managing her self-directed learning well, the LA does not need to provide much input. The main purpose of the discursive devices used in this extract is to encourage the learner and reassure her that she is on track. However, there was one aspect of the learner's work that the LA highlighted (lines 4-6). The LA does not give suggestions about what the student could do to increase

listening opportunities, but instead attempts to elicit ideas from the learner. The use of two “expert opinions” (lines 8 and 10) highlight to the learner the importance of confidence-building and vocabulary-building.

Extract 5 (LA 1)

This extract shows a more directive approach in action with a learner who appeared to need more direction from the LA. The learner is not balancing her learning activities well. Her goal is to improve her speaking skills by focusing on grammar, but she appears to be focusing exclusively on grammar study and not at all on her speaking skills.

		Code
1	You seem to be putting in a lot of effort.	
2	Are you using relative pronouns more effectively now?	PFR
3	Has your study been effective?	PFR
4	Remember that it is important to use all parts of the SURE plan, and to	Expert opinion
5	make sure they link to your needs and your goals.	
6	When you write your diary for next week, could you show the S. U. R. E	Directive
7	part, please?	
8-11	...	PFR
12	Sorry for all the questions!	
13	Good luck with this week's study.	

This extract was taken from week 3 of the learner’s self-directed work. In the previous two weeks, the LA has used a range of less directive discursive devices, but as the learner continues to lack focus, the LA becomes more directive in this instance. The LA begins (as usual) with encouragement (line 1), then asks a question about whether the learner is using the grammar that she had studied and whether it had been effective (lines 2 and 3). Presumably, the LA suspects that the learner has not been practicing speaking at all, but instead of confronting the learner, the LA chooses to ask questions that prompt further reflection. The LA then makes a general statement about good practice for self-directed learning (lines 4-5) but follows up with a request for the learner to explicitly state how well she is balancing her learning activities the following week. Presumably, the LA hopes that by focusing on the balance, the learner will then be able to make her own connections about effective learning. The LA asks several other questions (lines 8-11) and finishes by apologizing for the questions and encouraging the learner for the following week.

Limitations

Clearly, there are several limitations associated with this study. Firstly, it is a small study involving just seven learning advisors providing comments on work over an eight-week period in one particular context so broader applications may be limited. Secondly, although the authors have attempted to provide background to the learners' work and progress, the data only shows the advisors' part in the ongoing dialogue. Advising is reported to be a process of co-construction of knowledge (Karlsson, 2008) and a process of negotiation and interaction (Mozzon-McPherson, 2001). Analysis should ideally take into account both participants' contributions to the dialogue. Further analysis is planned which takes these dialogic implications into account. Thirdly, the researchers are only making assumptions about the LAs' intentions for the written advising approaches and there would have been benefits to interviewing the LAs (which was not practical for the present research). Finally, the extracts have been presented in isolation without access to information on the previous and on the further development of the self-directed learning program. Further analysis is planned and the researchers intend to track one learner and one advisor throughout the module and self-directed learning process in order to investigate the co-constructed relationship of this kind of advising. Despite these limitations, the data has provided some indications of the ways in which LAs provide input to learners in written form which will be useful for training learning advisors and discussion on written advising practices.

Conclusions and Discussion

Through the analysis of written advising, the authors have attempted to show how a team of LAs give advice in written form to learners on their self-directed work. Although this study has its limitations, some interesting observations can be drawn. Firstly, in the analysed corpus there were no obvious fixed patterns of written advising. LAs appeared to either favour different discursive devices, or were responding to what they thought would most benefit the learner at the particular stage that he/she was at with his/her self-directed learning. The second observation was that the LAs appeared to negotiate the more directive-less directive continuum much as the counsellors did in Candlin and Lucas' (1986) study. The discursive devices were generally non-directive, but became more directive when a learner appeared not to benefit from the more subtle interventions introduced in previous weeks.

What appears to be indicated by this small study and the previous research into how written advising influenced self-directed learning (Mynard, 2012) is that (1) it is appropriate for LAs to use more directive and less directive discursive devices according to the needs and levels of awareness the students have at a particular time and (2) LAs appear to be instinctively targeting their written advising to the learners' needs and levels of awareness of the learning process.

Conducting research on written advising has a number of benefits for the advising team. Firstly, the findings are reassuring for the LAs as they indicate that LAs are responding to students' needs. Secondly, the team of LAs are able to broaden their awareness and skills of written advising through the examination of the kinds of discursive devices that other LAs use. Thirdly, this kind of information is useful for training new advisors who are often insecure about the comments they are writing and whether or not they are actually helpful for the learners.

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Translanguaging in Self-Access Language Advising: Informing Language Policy

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Abstract

This study investigates language advising in a self-access center (SAC) with the purpose of informing language policy. This center is located in a new Japanese university and has shifted from an initially teacher-imposed ‘English-only’ language policy into one which encourages “translanguaging” (Blackledge & Creese, 2010, p. 105) between the students’ and center advisors’ (termed as mentors in this center) L1 (Japanese) and their L2 (English). Data from audio-recordings of interaction with advisors and students and between students themselves, interviews with mentors, and student questionnaires all reveal how translanguaging occurs in practice and how it helps to create a learning space in which the “local, pragmatic coping tactics” (Lin, 2005, p. 46) of code-switching offer a more viable approach for learning than under its initial monolingual policy. Mentor interviews and student questionnaires indicate generally positive attitudes towards translanguaging; however, some students still favor an ‘English-only’ policy. Conclusions reveal that a looser language policy in the center is emerging in which mentors now guide students towards their own individualized language policies. It is argued in this paper that this “code choice” (Levine, 2011) in language use is therefore aligned more closely to the principles of student-direction in self-access use.

Keywords: self-access, translanguaging, language policy

This study investigates the issues surrounding language policy in a self-access center (SAC) in a Japanese university. Its primary purpose is to highlight how an initially strict ‘English-only’ policy has been reformulated in light of views and observations from the center’s users – students and center advisors (mentors) – from student questionnaires, mentor interviews, and audio recordings of student talk and mentor advisory sessions. The practice of “translanguaging” (Blackledge & Creese, 2010, p. 105) is put forward as a key concept here. Translanguaging is basically the mixing of languages, or code-switching, in bilingual educational settings. Whereas code-switching is a term to describe the interactional changes between languages in various contexts, translanguaging is a process in which code-switching is seen as a tool in a pedagogical approach to negotiate meaning in classroom settings, particularly multilingual ones. Not without controversy, it is nevertheless seen by Cummins (2005) as a bilingual strategy instrumental in building motivation and

language awareness. With this potential, we take this approach as viable for our particular self-access center.

The paper firstly provides contextual details concerning the center, and then critically analyzes the key areas of the literature relevant to language policy in educational settings. After explaining the methodology, the triangulated data will then be presented and discussed. Conclusions and implications for this particular center are then drawn which may have some resonance for other self-access centers seeking to formulate language policies.

Context

This SAC was established in April 2009 at a new four-year university in Japan. A committee steers its operation and comprises English language and content faculty, and its three mentors. Mentors maintain the center and its resources, and provide language learning advice to students. The university has three main fields of study with English as the medium of content instruction for some subjects. All first grade students take compulsory English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes to prepare them for the academic demands of content lessons in English. The SAC's role is to support students in their learning of languages and also content, meaning that advice is needed for academic study in the students' L1 and other languages.

The center is located in a well-equipped, large room with internet-linked computers, a reception area, tables, chairs, sofa and a carpeted area which can accommodate roughly fifty students. Resources for self-study consist of English graded reader collections, DVDs, grammar reference materials, games, authentic content curricula reading materials. There are also some self-study materials for Chinese, Korean, and Russian. The English language resources are integrated with the EAP curriculum by giving course credit for use of graded readers and audio CDs. Daily visits have grown from approximately 15 students per day in 2009 to 70 in 2011 as the university has increased in size. Along with integration with the EAP program, workshops are given by mentors to support essential academic skills, for example, academic writing.

Upon its establishment in spring 2009, the SAC's new committee consisting of language teachers and mentors met to formulate various policies of operation, one being language policy. At that time, the committee decided to adopt an 'English-only' language policy in the center with a line separating the mentors' reception area from the rest of the room. In the space near the reception desk, students were allowed to speak either English or Japanese, but in the area beyond that a strict 'English-only' policy was put in operation. After opening, students had to be frequently reminded of the policy and some students voiced objection at not being allowed to use Japanese. Students with lower proficiency and lesser motivation to learn languages visited the center less frequently than the more proficient and enthusiastic students.

Questionnaire feedback and comments to teachers and mentors suggested that the monolingual policy was causing some students to avoid using the center. A reassessment of the policy was discussed in committee meetings in the summer of 2009 and, despite objections from some teachers, the original 'English only' policy was replaced with a more relaxed version meant to encourage all students to use the SAC facilities.

Aims of the study

The reformulation of the language policy was seen as an on-going objective for the committee after the initial experiences of the first year of operation. As the first policy had been decided upon by committee members, it was thought best to avoid the

top-down nature of such policy formulation for its revised version. For this purpose, evidence was drawn from the actual use of languages by students and mentors, student questionnaires, and mentor interviews. There was, in essence, a shift in policy-making from a top-down style to one with a more bottom-up orientation and therefore informed by students and mentors rather than decided upon by teachers. From its opening, the committee had been researching various aspects of the center's use (resources use, extensive reading, student autonomy, curriculum integration) by means of annual student questionnaires which asked students about how they used the

center. In order to investigate their language use in the center in more detail for the purpose of this study, these data were supplemented with audio-recordings and interviews specifically related to language use in the center.

Literature Review

The literature in the field of translanguaging is relatively new, but studies into its related themes of code-switching, bilingualism and multilingualism are well-documented (Baker, 2006; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Garcia, 2009; Martin, 2005; Williams, 1996). Much of this research is based on investigations into language use in classrooms or society, whereas the context for language policy in this study is that of a self-access center where principles of autonomy and student choice should be fostered (Gardner & Miller, 1999). By autonomy and choice, Lynch (2001) refers to the situations in which students can study on their own and the skills they need to develop for self-directed learning. Lynch (2001) explains that this process is influenced by factors such as whether the institution encourages or inhibits self-study, the sense of responsibility that students need to adopt to achieve it, and finally, their rights to determine their own direction in learning.

Some centers are similar to classrooms where immersion language education adopts a “two solitudes” approach (Cummins, 2005) to language acquisition. This approach to language acquisition separates languages so that the students’ L1 is not regarded as a resource in learning another language. As a consequence, L1 use is not permitted in some self-access centers. This approach is challenged in this study on two grounds. Firstly, the top-down imposition of policy which forbids the student L1 fails to develop student self-determination and “code choice” (Levine, 2011, p. 3) in the decision-making process. Levine (2011) sees the rights of students to make their own strategic choices in code-switching between their L1 and the L2 as important resources in language acquisition, and also in their development of life-long learning strategies. Furthermore, a self-access center may differ fundamentally as a “learning space” (Savin-Baden, 2008, p. 13) from a classroom. “Learning space” is a conceptualization of classrooms or any place where learning takes place, formally or

informally. The interactional rules of a classroom may be typically made by teachers, termed by Savin-Baden (2008, p. 13) as “striated” spaces, as opposed to “smooth” spaces (p. 13) in which rules are negotiated, challenged and determined by learners themselves. Following this argument, if self-access centers are truly “smooth” spaces in which principles of autonomy are nurtured, then students’ abilities and rights to choose their language code in that learning space need to be exercised and developed. That process of making languages choices between the students’ L1 and L2 may be flawed and require reflection and advice as to its effectiveness (Candas, 2011). Without the opportunity to choose, self-determination as an underlying principle becomes limited to making strategy choices about language use unrelated to what actual language codes may be best utilized.

Secondly, if students’ L1 and their target L2 are allowed to intermingle, as in “translanguaging”, the reality of natural code-switching in multicultural societies is mirrored (Canagarajah, 2006) as bilinguals utilize the “ethnolinguistic repertoires” (Benor, 2010) at their disposal to achieve everyday tasks. This suggests that banning students’ L1 is not conducive to preparing students for language use in non-institutional, particularly multilingual, contexts. Proponents of translanguaging view L1 use positively as a linguistic resource in study and non-study environments to develop “local, pragmatic coping tactics” (Lin 2005, p 46). Furthermore, it develops the flexibility to “shuttle between [language] communities” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 26) and provides “safe” language practice opportunities (Martin 2005, p. 80) for less linguistically proficient or less motivated students.

However, a translanguaging policy must consider the consequences of feelings of “dilemma” and “guilt” (Setati, Adler, Reed & Bapoo, 2002, p. 147) among students more accustomed to learning languages without access to their L1. Also of importance is the actual effectiveness it has in developing language and strategy skills. If given choices how and when to switch languages, students assume an empowering self-managing role of their own language acquisition and reflect upon those choices (Cummins, 2005; Blackledge & Creeese, 2010), which, in terms of self-access use is a metacognitive skill essential in autonomous learning. Studies into

student-determined strategy use in self-access by Candas (2011, p. 201) reveal that students engage in “loose piloting”, in which they switch strategies in seemingly inconsistent patterns. This was termed as “organising circumstance” in earlier studies by Spear and Mocker (1984, p. 4) and basically implies that students do not apply study strategies to certain tasks as planned. It may be the case that they are intentionally experimenting with a variety of strategies, or alternatively, that they have forgotten what strategy is best to use. If applied to code-switching practice, then this too implies that inconsistencies of use may occur and some teacher or mentor advice concerning their “habits or routines” may still be of benefit in making students reflect on their choices (Candas, 2011, p. 201). Essentially, this suggests that translanguaging may require some monitoring if implemented.

Methodology

An ethnographic archive of self-access use has been compiled since 2009 in the center to facilitate research into the various facets of its operation (resource use, metaphors, management). It adopts a methodology of data collection from multiple sources: questionnaires, interviews, casual conversations, audio-recordings of interaction, and statistical calculations of student and materials use (see Adamson, Brown & Fujimoto-Adamson, 2011). For the purpose of this study, data concerning language practice in the center come from the following sources: questionnaires gathered from all 240 first-graders across the various fields (January, 2010) at the end of their first academic year; audio recordings of talk between volunteer student assistants and mentors (November, 2010), among a group of students (January, 2011), and between a student and a mentor in an advisory session (September, 2011); and finally, data from long interviews with mentors (November, 2010).

The limitations of this methodology lie primarily in the small amount of data available from naturally-occurring talk between students, and students and mentors. Additionally, the presence of audio-recorders coupled with knowledge of the research aims given to students through informed consent could possibly lead participants into unnatural code-switching, or even avoiding it due to feelings of guilt.

Findings and Discussion

Questionnaires

The first set of data to be presented and analyzed emanates from questionnaire responses from all first-year students (240 students) at the end of the first year of SAC's operation. There are three main fields of study at the university, one in which the majority of 160 students take some content classes in English, and two smaller fields (both approximately of 40 students) in which content is delivered exclusively in Japanese. The researchers expected that the majority of students who take content classes in English visiting the SAC would report that they used more English than Japanese in the center. Unexpectedly, however, the reverse was found. On average, the 160 student majority reported that they use English and Japanese equally time-wise, yet the 80 students from the two smaller fields reported that they use English more often than Japanese. Upon further investigation of the questionnaire responses, by asking mentors and students from those two smaller fields it became clear that the latter students' use of English was more confined to simple exchanges concerning borrowing and returning resources, whereas students in the larger field of study were more likely to try to use English initially in more challenging speech events (enquiries about study skills, writing structure and grammar) but code-switched into Japanese when they felt unable to cope lexically. When examining the data for the length of time spent in the center, the 160 students stayed considerably longer per visit than the other 80, showing perhaps that in these visits they attempted to engage in interaction in English with mentors, and each other, in demanding tasks. Students in the two smaller fields were less likely to spend their time in the center for such purposes, instead frequently visiting it for quick borrowing and returning purposes. The use of formulaic language in such exchanges by this group may therefore account for their more frequent English usage.

When asked about the initial 'English-only' language policy marked by a line in the SAC, most students reported that they code-switched in this area between English and Japanese on various tasks, but one student was quoted as saying: 'the border is meaningless' as many students did not adhere to the language policy.

Another student asked: ‘Why don’t mentors force people to speak English?’ These quite strong views were echoed among a minority (7) of the 160 students only, yet they are a sign that there is an expectation, or belief, concerning language acquisition that the “two solitudes” approach (Cummins, 2005) of strict language separation should be an aim for the center. Significantly, it was clear that these students viewed the mentors as gate-keepers of language policy in a formal “learning space” (Savin-Baden, 2008).

Audio-recordings of interaction

In the first of three sets of long audio-recordings (all with students’ consent), two female SAC assistants (student volunteers helping the mentors with simple tasks in their free time) were recorded in November, 2010 interacting with two mentors. The student assistants were engaged in the task of preparing some Halloween decorations for the SAC. While cutting and coloring in a table adjacent to the mentors’ reception desk, talk switched thematically between their task and their recent social activities. It was observed that the students spoke a lot of English, especially when enquiring about how to make the decorations and where to place them in the center. When the task-focused talk became linguistically difficult, or when directions needed to be confirmed with the mentors, the students tended to code-switch to Japanese, as in ‘Kore wa yaranakute mo ii desuka?’ (We don’t need to do this, right?). The mentors themselves conversed with the student assistants exclusively in English. In terms of how the students’ code-switching was constructed, intersentential switching was the norm, i.e. languages were switched on a sentence by sentence basis. Interestingly, when the talk changed to non-task themes of their social activities, intrasentential code-switching – word injections of Japanese inside English sentences – was more common among the two student assistants, for example: ‘We had yakiniku for dinner’ (grilled beef), or ‘We had nanka… a difficult time at the bus station’ (nanka means ‘sort of’ or ‘like’ to express vagueness in Japanese). The delineation between inter- and intra- sentential code-switching in this case was

dependent on the theme, and, in the latter, Japanese injections also depended on the lexical difficulty of what the student assistants wished to convey.

In the second interaction from January 2011, six male students were recorded in the center in their English Speaking Society weekly meeting. Although this interaction did not involve the mentors in any social or advisory capacity, it is an example of student to student interaction in the center with mentors available to assist in any communication breakdown. In this sense, the recording does not represent an advisory session, but nevertheless is a speech event which could involve advice and is also informative as to how students formed their own language policy.

The students talked on three themes: campus and daily life, international politics, and learning English mainly in English. Some intrasentential code-switching was observed involving Japanese word injections of difficult, specific lexical items such as soran-bushi (traditional sea shanty songs), shogatsu (New Year), and zoni (traditional New Year soup). Intersentential code-switching was observed occasionally when students excitedly wanted to push the conversation forward, for example, when one student said: 'Yoshi, tamaruze pointo ga' (OK, I'm collecting points). The response from another member to this was insightful in that he said 'Yes, but no Japanese is allowed,' which not only shows the intersentential nature of their code-switching, but also the enforcement of their own language policy for that meeting. In that respect, it was unnecessary for a mentor or teacher to intervene in the "loose piloting" (Candas, 2011, p. 201) of one student speaking Japanese as his peer took on that role. Interestingly, it was not enforced when one-word Japanese intrasentential code-switching occurred, but only for longer sentence interjections as illustrated above.

The third recording in September, 2011 was between a female student and a mentor in an advisory session concerning an essay. For this linguistically demanding task, both student and mentor spoke mainly Japanese, with English used in an intrasentential manner for specific lexical and grammar items; for example, the mentor explained pronoun use as follows (English injections are underlined):

‘Travel agency toka, Paris no maeni a ha iranai yone, at jyanakute in ne’ (When you use words like travel agency etc, you don’t need ‘a’ in front of Paris, not ‘at’, but ‘in’, OK.)

Some rare instances of intersentential code-switching only occurred in greetings and at the end of the advisory session, as in:

Mentor: Very good. Well done.

Student: Arigato gozaimasu. Thank you.

Overall, the audio-recordings illustrate the code-switching mechanics of translanguaging in three micro contexts. More data is needed to be able to find clearer patterns; however, from our findings, code-switching from speakers’ L2 (English) to their L1 (Japanese) appeared to depend very much upon lexical and thematic difficulty in the case of when more linguistically competent speakers (mentors) were in interaction with possibly less competent student assistants. The different context of the English Speaking Society was interesting in that students switched from their L2 to L1 only for short unknown lexis, perhaps illustrating how students of similar competence were prepared to continue interacting in their L2 despite conversing on difficult themes. The final mentor-mentee advisory session was similar to the first student assistant to mentor interaction in that talk switched quickly from the L2 to L1 when complex essay-related themes were under discussion. A possible avenue for further exploration would be to monitor code-switching according the contexts and participants’ positioning towards each other and to see if status plays a role in code-switching choices. Finally, of some importance for students and mentors, in the analytical process itself one mentor-researcher noted the awareness-raising value for herself, and possibly for students themselves, in listening to the recordings.

Mentor interviews

In November, 2010, in-depth interviews were held between one teacher-researcher and three mentors on language use in the center, during which four themes emerged: translanguaging, guilt, the mentors' observations of student language use, and the idea of mentors as potential language role models for students.

The first theme explored what happened when the mentors themselves translanguaged. Mentors unanimously stated that they switched into Japanese to explain grammar, essay structure, and discuss study skills as the previous monolingual policy restricted them in effectively discussing such complex issues in the students' L1. One noted that she felt it essential to speak Japanese 'when the eyes go blank,' or when students simply smile, both paralinguistic signs of non-comprehension. Translanguaging into English occurred when simple, functional interaction was needed, for example, returning and borrowing resources and asking about their availability.

The second theme of guilt, as discussed in the literature (Setati et al, 2002), addressed whether mentors perceived such feelings among students, or harbored them themselves, when using Japanese. None was reported, one mentor commenting that 'it's natural they speak in Japanese because I'm Japanese.' However, another mentor who had regularly observed the male students' English Speaking Society noted the self-regulating measures taken by students themselves when intersentential code-switching occurred. This student-enforcement of language policy could possibly lead to some feelings of guilt being imposed on students not abiding by their own rules. Asked if mentors felt any pressure to enforce the old monolingual policy in the first year, some did confirm that they felt extremely uncomfortable with this 'teacher-like' role. The looser policy which emerged in the latter part of the first year of operation onwards came as a relief, one commenting that 'it felt good to be able to discuss individual language policy with students, rather than try to keep in place a monolingual policy.' This requires some time spent with students unsure of which languages to use in various tasks and may also involve much 'trial and error' when students attempt to implement their own policies, a scenario which resonates with the inconsistencies of "loose piloting" reported by Candas (2011, p.201).

The third theme focused on the mentors' observations of when students used English, potentially an insightful contrast with questionnaire data from students about when they claimed to use English. Mentors said that students generally attempted to use mostly English when preparing for English presentations, or completing speaking class tasks, both tasks which were set by teachers. Alternatively, some highly-motivated students were observed to regularly speak in English simply to improve their speaking.

The fourth theme addressed Murphey's (1996) "near peer role models" to which one mentor remarked that a common feeling existed among students that admiration was shown towards both mentors and senior students who spoke English in the center. Another mentor commented that students regarded it as 'cool' to speak in English, creating a possible 'trickle down effect' to students less confident in using English.

Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

Findings from this small-scale study on language use and policy reformulation in a SAC suggest that diverse expectations and voices exist. Many students and all mentors in this particular university see translanguaging as a means to create a "learning space" (Savin-Baden, 2008) in which "safe" language practice (Martin, 2005, p. 80) can take place, especially for those less confident or motivated to conform to an 'English-only' policy. The concept of translanguaging as a learning strategy to enable "local, pragmatic coping" (Lin, 2005, p.46) in various tasks was generally accepted, yet a substantial minority of the students still saw the center as a place where language learning would be better if separated from their L1. This suggests that a minority expected mentors to adopt the role of policy enforcers, although the majority clearly did not harbor strong objections to the relaxation of the initial language policy.

Translanguaging in practice was observed in three cases, the findings of which suggest that code-switching and language use may depend on task type

(teacher-determined homework or originated by students themselves), and its difficulty (simple borrowing and returning interactions or more demanding enquiries about essays and study skills). Clear patterns of “loose piloting” (Candas, 2011, p. 201) were difficult to trace in the data and may simply require more recordings over time, as well as monitoring by mentors.

The role of the mentors in language policy formulation in the center was adjudged to be pivotal as they could observe student interaction and shape it in advisory sessions. Since they saw translanguaging as a welcome relief from the initial monolingual policy, their role has evolved into one in which they no longer need to enforce a monolingual language policy which discouraged some students from using the center. As mentors now discuss and help students reflect upon their own personal language use, they seem to conduct a type of advising which encourages students to adopt a more autonomous learning style. In addition, it creates the type of self access center “learning space” that Savin-Baden (2008) outlined, which also is more conducive to student exploration of their own “code choices,” as described by Levine (2011).

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Professional Development for Learning Advisors: Facilitating the Intentional Reflective Dialogue

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Abstract

This paper describes a study which explored how intentional reflective dialogue with an interlocutor can deepen Learning Advisors' (advisors') reflective learning in terms of their own professional development (PD). As one of the key roles of advisors in self-directed language learning is to activate learners' reflective learning processes, it is worthwhile for advisors to experience reflective learning process for themselves as a part of a PD program. Eight advisors, with experience ranging from one to three years, participated in this study. Each had two interviews with the interlocutor (the author). Although most of the advisors often self-reflect and have conversations regarding advising with colleagues, the reflective dialogue which was intentionally structured for training purposes resulted in advisors being engaged in a different type of self-reflective approach. The results of the study showed there are potential benefits for developing a continuing PD program for experienced advisors by introducing the reflective dialogue.

Keywords: reflective dialogue, continuing professional development, training, learning advisor, self-access center

Advising and Self-Access

Self-access language learning (SALL) promoted through self-access centers (SACs) has been given due attention during the past decade, and this has been evidenced by an increasing number of research papers, journals, articles, books, and conferences. Definitions of the functions and roles of SACs vary between institutions. However, Gardner and Miller (1999) emphasize that SACs consist of a number of elements, such as providing resources (learning materials, activities, technology), people (teachers, counselors, staff), and systems (facility management, learner/staff training, goal-setting, assessment) to support learners' individualized learning. In addition, SACs encourage learners' development through needs analysis and reflection on learning (Gardner & Miller, 1999, pp. 8-11). Sekiya, Mynard and Cooker (2010) state that "the promotion of learner autonomy within a self-access centre needs to be carefully supported through one or more of the following: learning philosophy, learner development, an advising service, opportunities for

individualization, opportunities for interaction and negotiation in the target language, and materials design” (p. 237).

Among the above mentioned major elements of SACs, the study described in this paper focuses on the advising service provided by Learning Advisors (advisors) whose aim is to promote self-access learning at SACs. The paper attempts to establish a rationale for an ongoing professional development (PD) program for advisors.

Ongoing PD for Advisors

The advisor’s job can sometimes be misunderstood and seen as a way to simply provide learning tips to learners, such as teaching learners how to increase vocabulary effectively or telling learners how to get better scores on tests. This implies that a teacher can naturally become an advisor without receiving proper training. However, the main job of an advisor is to empower learners and to help them to become more capable of taking charge of their own language learning as defined by Holec (1981). Mozzon-McPherson (2001) suggests that the central role of an advisor is as follows:

“advisers provide ‘a frame’, a set of conditions within which learners can have or hold the responsibility of some or all the decisions concerning aspects of their learning, from stating their aims to determining their objectives to defining the contents, selecting methods and techniques and finally evaluating the process and the knowledge.” (p. 180)

Providing learners with such support and raising their awareness of cognitive and metacognitive learning processes involves a set of unique skills (Kelly, 1996; Riley, 1997). In order to explore and cater for each learner’s needs in one-to-one advising sessions, advisors may have to incorporate skills and knowledge from a wider background such as the fields of counseling, life coaching, mentoring, and teaching. Therefore, in order to function effectively as an advisor and to continue to develop as an advisor, one needs to go through proper training. Gardner and Miller (1999) focus on the importance of advisor training and suggest that “counseling is not a static

technique that can be learned and then applied. Staff development in counselling needs to be an ongoing process" (p. 189).

Nevertheless, there is a lack of empirical research and well-established PD programs for advisors. Mozzon-McPherson (2001) highlights the necessity of providing appropriate staff development programs to ensure a "reorientation of the teacher and their discourse which can in fact be 'compatible with' and supportive of the radical notion of learner autonomy" (p. 17).

Initial Training Program: Preparing for the New Profession

In general, one of the biggest challenges the majority of advisors may face when they start this new profession is likely to be the shift in direction of the idea of "control". This challenge seems to be greater especially if one has teaching experience prior to becoming an advisor. However, regardless of prior professional experiences, it is essential that every advisor receives initial training to learn about what this profession entails.

The author has worked as a learning advisor at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), a university providing programs in foreign languages, and is currently working at Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages (KIFL), a two-year vocational school with an intensive focus on language learning. Both institutions are located in Japan and have established SACs. Since these two SACs are run by the same parent organization, the Sano Educational Foundation with more than forty years of experience in providing educational services in language learning in Japan, the advisors working at KUIS and KIFL share a similar philosophy and approach to the practice of advising in language learning. A new advisor at both institutions participates in an initial training program which includes, but is not limited to the following: philosophical background, basics of advising, and self-reflection.

First of all, a new advisor must learn the history and background of the institution/center and to understand the definitions of learner autonomy and the aims of the advising service provided at that particular institution/center. Therefore, the

new advisor has to attend orientations and presentations on self-directed language learning and advising.

Secondly, new advisors are asked to read articles and books on advising, listen to other advisors' recorded sessions, participate in discussions and role-plays, and receive feedback from senior advisors. The intention of this portion of the training is for new advisors to learn the theories of advising, focus on advising skills and strategies and become aware of how the discourse of advising is different from discourse used in classroom teaching.

Thirdly, advisors are required to participate in a formal PD program in their first year at the institution. The advisors are encouraged to self-reflect by critically listening to their own recorded sessions while focusing on certain issues in advising. This approach to PD aims to raise the metacognitive awareness of the advisor's own learning process, and to enable them to benefit from feedback from senior advisors.

The initial training and formal PD program provides not only skill-based training but also focuses heavily on concept-based training. Kodate and Foale (forthcoming) described the above mentioned PD program and researched the advisors' perceptions of the program and how the community of practice explored by Wenger (1998) is relevant to the development of advisors. Kodate and Foale's research concluded that such a community of practice would complement the existing formal institutional PD program through members sharing practices and establishing a collective identity.

Indeed, the full benefits of the PD program can only be achieved by having a holistic approach. Taking into account the above discussed research, the study described later in this paper highlights the importance of developing an appropriate continuing PD program for experienced advisors who participated in the initial PD program in an early stage in their careers. From experience of working as a dedicated full-time learning advisor for six years and coordinating advisor training programs, the author believes that no matter how experienced an advisor may be, ongoing training needs to be provided to ensure continuous professional growth.

Ongoing Professional Learning through Reflection

There is always a risk that once advisors establish their own style of advising, they may not challenge themselves to try different advising styles. Advisors might use similar advising approaches, give the same advice repeatedly based on their established assumptions, or recommend the same material repeatedly without investigating other areas. This is where fossilization and stagnation can occur. In order to avoid such situations, the author suggests the introduction of an intentionally structured reflective dialogue with a colleague or a senior advisor as a part of the continuing PD program.

In order to facilitate advisors' ongoing learning from practice, advisors need to explore themselves as advisors through the process of reflection. The term reflection has been defined by many researchers. Dewey's (1933) definition of reflection is "that which involves active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads" (p. 9). According to Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), effective learning will not be achieved without reflection. Schön (1983) is recognized as one of the leading researchers on reflection for enhancing professions by identifying two types of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. He suggests that the knowledge professionals have is expressed easily through their actions, but articulating the procedures that underline their practice is not easy.

Boyd and Fales (1983) define reflection as the "*process* of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience (present or past) in terms of self (self in relation to self and self in relation to the world)" (p. 101), and they investigate how the process of reflection facilitates professional development. They repeatedly interviewed practicing counselors in an ongoing clinical training program and observed how their reflection progressed. Boyd and Fales stipulate that reflection may bring about "a changed conceptual perspective" (p.100) which would be beneficial for "professional learning from experience, personal growth, and for all the helping professions, both in professionals' own continuing learning and in facilitating the learning and growth of their clients" (p.114-115).

Based on the previous research and on her own experience as an advisor, the author believes that advisors may potentially benefit from going through the process of deep reflection by themselves in order to facilitate their learners' reflective process.

Reflection through Dialogue

Research on professional development emphasizes the critical roles of reflective learning (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Schön, 1983). Brockbank and McGill (2006) focus on methods of reflection and how they are achieved. They especially focus on reflective dialogue. Brockbank and McGill argue that “while intrapersonal reflection is effective and may offer opportunities for deep learning, which may or may not be shared with another, *it is ultimately not enough to promote transformatory learning*” (p. 53). The process of self-reflection has the benefit of offering opportunities for deep learning and there is no doubt that self-reflection is at the center of any type of professional development. However, as Brockbank and McGill describe, self-reflection is not enough to promote transformatory learning as learning is limited to the insight of individuals and observing oneself critically is difficult. Dialogue with others offers possibilities to restructure one’s established assumptions and beliefs which can lead one to develop further as a professional.

Since the role of advisors is to activate learners’ reflective processes in language learning through a one-to-one dialogue, it is essential for advisors to focus on promoting a one-to-one reflective dialogue as part of the advisors’ PD process. Brockbank, McGill and Beech (2002) note that an intentional dialogue is different from an ordinary dialogue in a way that “dialogue does occur naturally between people, but for effective reflective learning, intentional dialogue is necessary” (p. 23) and “reflection-with-others, or dialogue, offers the power of challenge and different perspectives to the learner, and ultimately the potential for double-loop learning” (p. 21). Single-loop learning refers to learning where existing values, beliefs, and ways of learning are unchanged. Double-loop learning refers to learning where existing

values, beliefs, and ways of learning are challenged and where learning for transformation takes place. Brockbank and McGill (2006) suggest that “double loop learning, in questioning ‘taken-for-granteds’ (tfgs) has the potential to bring about a profound shift in underlying values by cracking their paradigms or ‘ways of seeing the world’ (p. 33). Argyris and Schön (1974) emphasize the necessity of double-loop learning which involves careful reflection not only on actions but also on the outcomes these actions are aiming at. They described it as follows: “In single-loop learning, we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing variables. In double-loop learning, we learn to change the field of constancy itself” (p.19).

The Study: Facilitating the Intentional Reflective Dialogue

Methodology

This study sheds light on facilitating reflective dialogue between an advisor and an interlocutor (the author), which is intentionally structured for training purposes, in order to develop an effective ongoing PD for advisors. To observe whether double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön , 1974; Brockbank & McGill, 2006) is occurring within the intentional reflective dialogue, the effectiveness of the dialogues were analyzed based on: 1) Whether advisors were critically reflecting on their goals, beliefs, values, conceptual framework, and 2) Whether advisors were identifying discrepancies between their beliefs and their actual behavior. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a post- interview questionnaire, and a self-reflective journal which was kept by the author (interviewer) throughout the study.

Participants

Eight advisors from the overseas and Japan with experience of advising ranging from one to three years working in SACs, participated in this study. Six of them were from Kanda University of International Studies and two of them were from Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages. All eight advisors participated in the initial PD program with a supervisor, a trainer, or senior colleagues. The advisors were asked to

have a one-to-one intentional reflective dialogue with the author to explore whether the intentional reflective dialogue deepened their reflections and enhanced their learning.

Interview procedures

A one-to-one interview was held twice with each advisor, the total interview time being 13.5 hours. All the interviews were recorded, partially transcribed, and analyzed. A questionnaire was administered after the second interview. In addition, the interviewer kept a self-reflective journal to reflect on the dialogues conducted for the 16 interviews. In the first interview, an advising tool (the Wheel of Learning Advising (WLA), see Figure 1) was used to help advisors reflect not only on a particular session (or sessions) with a student but also to reflect critically on themselves more generally as advisors. Questions regarding advisors' values and beliefs of advising in language learning were asked in order to investigate the notion of "who you are" as an advisor (see Appendix). The advisors analyzed their past and current situations in order to engage themselves in a deeper level of reflection. The advisors were not only asked to share their beliefs and values, but their existing beliefs and values were also challenged. Towards the end of the interviews, the advisors were encouraged to share their future visions and establish action plans which they considered to be beneficial for their development.

In order to ensure that the tone of the interviews was semi-formal, the interviewer prepared questions which advisors might not usually encounter in a casual dialogue. Examples of questions were: "What would your ideal learning advisor be like?", "If that is your ideal advisor, can you use a metaphor to describe where you are at now?", "You repeatedly used xxx (the words depends on each advisor) in our conversation. What does it mean to you?" (see Appendix). This attempt at semi-formality was made as all of the participants were the author's ex- or current colleagues and an overly casual conversation might have prevented advisors from engaging in a deeper level of reflection.

The second interview was held three months later, and the advisors were shown the WLA which they had drawn three months previously in order to reflect on their progress. Whereas there was a major focus on finding the existing values, beliefs, and hidden issues in the first interview, the dialogues in the second interview were more organic and with less structure. In fact, it was the second interview where more experience sharing and discussions occurred between the interviewee and interviewer, and where a deeper level of advisors' engagement could be observed.

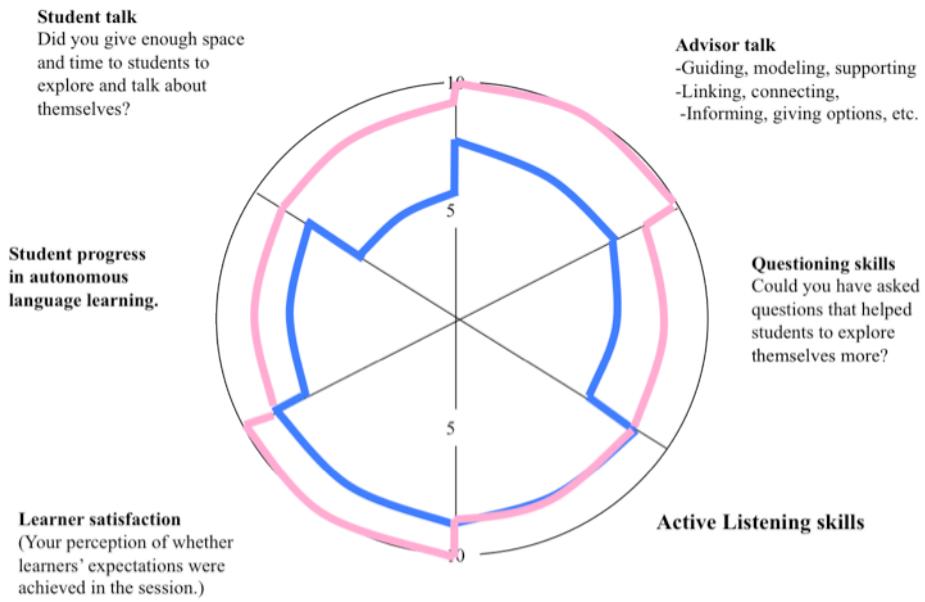
Data Collection

A tool for reflection: The Wheel of Learning Advising (WLA)

Kato & Sugawara (2009) introduced a tool for advising, the Wheel of Language Learning (WLL) based on the original idea derived from the field of life coaching (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 2007). It is beneficial for several reasons: 1) Visual support helps learners to experience deeper reflective processes. Serving as a visual tool, the WLL has advantages over text-based tools not only for visual learners but for other types of learners (Yamashita & Kato, forthcoming). 2) It provides learners with more opportunities to take a broader view of learning by identifying how each area in the WLL is linked, and 3) The WLL enables learners to talk actively and naturally and to take control of the dialogue with an advisor.

The WLL was adapted to create the WLA and this was used for this study. The WLA consists of six areas and advisors were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction in each area by drawing lines (see Figure 1). They were then asked to self-analyze the reasons for the levels. The participants of this study were asked to complete the WLA in both interviews to see their progresses visually.

Figure 1. Wheel of Learning Advising (WLA)



Self-reflective journal

The interviewer kept a self-reflective journal for the 16 interviews conducted. This served as a productive tool to foster the interviewer's own reflective thinking from a wider perspective on the interviewing process and analyzing the dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee. The following points were covered in each entry: 1) The overall impression of the interview, 2) The critical moment in the interview, 3) Words repeatedly used by the interviewee (to highlight the hidden issues), and 4) Self-evaluation (to reflect on whether the interviewer was able to conduct the intentional reflective dialogue effectively).

Post-interview questionnaire

A post-interview questionnaire was administered to the eight advisors. The aim of the questionnaire was to obtain written feedback from advisors and aid a more thorough understanding of the research area. The author prepared four open-ended questions which advisors were asked to reflect on (see Table 1). Written reflections on the interviews helped the advisors to deepen their perspectives (this aspect will be discussed later in the paper).

Table 1. Questions included in the Post-interview Questionnaire

1. Do you think the reflective dialogues helped you reflect on and became more aware of your advising? If yes, in what way? If no, what other ways do you think would have helped you reflect more?
2. By comparing the first and second interviews, could you see any achievement, progress, change, or difference in yourself as a Learning Advisor?
3. If you compare your responses/findings in the interviews with the reflections you had in the past (formal PD, advising diary, or in any kind of reflection), do you find any differences?
4. Would you prefer to reflect through dialogue or reflect internally (by yourself)? Why? Why not?

Data Analysis

Degrees of reflection

Methods for distinguishing the types and degrees of reflection varies. In this study, data were analyzed based on the concept of Argyris & Schön's (1974) 'single-loop' and 'double-loop' learning. There was a variation in the depth and the quality of reflection among advisors. The advisors with less experience were likely to focus on advising skills and techniques such as active listening skills and questioning skills where single-loop learning could be mainly observed. Many of them were worried about not knowing a variety of learning strategies and resources to recommend to students. Thus, the future action plans these advisors created were related to gaining knowledge on such skills, strategies, and techniques. Moreover, one less-experienced advisor had difficulties in reflecting on herself critically which prohibited her from benefitting from the double-loop learning process. Although recall was not very difficult, it was difficult for the interviewer to transform the recollection process into a deeper reflection level where the values and real issues may have been hidden. This experience indicated that the interviewer needed to be aware of the developmental phases of each advisor in order to provide guidance on conducting the intentional reflective dialogue.

On the other hand, the advisors with more experience needed less guidance and were likely to reach a deeper level of reflection during the interviews. Many of them challenged their existing values and beliefs and in these situations double-loop

learning could be observed. In such cases, the interviewer intentionally allowed time for *reflection*, with periods of *silence*, therefore, these interviews with more experienced advisors tended to be longer and much deeper. Some advisors were able to identify discrepancies between their beliefs and their actual behavior. During the interviews, some advisors examined their fear of failure and incorrect practice. For example, one advisor confessed that she tended to guide students not to choose some materials which she thought were not worth trying. She admitted that she did not want to put herself at a risk of being called an unprofessional advisor by letting her students try those materials. She questioned herself during the interview whether she was making the decisions for her students or for herself. Other advisors also explored their weaknesses as a practitioner by focusing on their identities, open-mindedness, and existing assumptions which were based on their own values. Through the intentional reflective dialogue, these advisors tried to renegotiate themselves or even re-challenge themselves.

Although less-experienced practitioners were primarily focusing on adjusting themselves to the new profession, the experienced advisors had a broader view and talked about their career path as an educator showing their interests and concerns with working as an advisor. However, regardless of the levels of experience, awareness-raising occurred through the intentional reflective dialogues. Below are some advisors' comments collected through the post-interview questionnaire administered to the advisors.

“I often reflect on and talk about my advising sessions with my colleagues, but I realized doing this kind of semi-formal session (intentional dialogue) will bring me to a deeper level of reflection that I can't usually reach.”

“For me, conversation is vital for reflection. I do it internally as well, but not nearly to the same degree. Ideally, I'd like a chance to talk one-on-one with a variety of advisors, and occasional group sessions.”

“Through the dialogue, I could find more about myself as an advisor. I self-reflect a lot and I was assuming that I have already clarified my thoughts well. But I realized the power of verbalizing my thoughts. Communicating with someone like you and getting feedback helps me to build up my strengths as an advisor.”

Although most of the advisors usually self-reflect and have conversations about advising with colleagues, it seems that the reflective dialogue which was intentionally structured for training purposes engaged the advisors in a different type of reflective approach and brought advisors to the level that cannot usually be reached by individual self-reflection.

Findings

The importance of having an “intentional” dialogue

The results of the feedback obtained from the interviews and the questionnaire administered to the advisors following the interviews were positive and the approach of introducing the intentional reflective dialogue was effective for encouraging advisors to engage in a deeper level of transformative learning. The two research questions of this study could be answered as follows. Firstly, the intentional reflective dialogue tends to allow advisors to reflect critically and explore themselves differently in a way which might not take place in an internal dialogue or in casual workplace conversations. It seems to provide advisors with an opportunity to reflect on themselves holistically and challenge their existing values. Secondly, some advisors were able to identify discrepancies between their beliefs and their actual behavior where advisors were noticeably open with their thoughts and feelings. Boyd and Fales (1983) call this openness stage “trust of self to discover” (p. 109). The author believes that the intentional reflective dialogue enables both parties to discover more about each other and this establishes a stronger rapport.

However, the depth and quality of reflection varied among advisors and not all advisors were able to critically reflect on their goals, beliefs, values, and conceptual framework or to identify discrepancies between their beliefs and their actual behavior. Further research needs to be conducted to explore ways to provide an effective reflective dialogue designed to cater for each advisor's developmental phase.

The unpredicted benefits

Although the original aim of this study was to develop an effective PD program for advisors through facilitating the intentional reflective dialogue, in fact, it was the interviewer who received the most effective training through the whole interviewing process. This is because the interviewer had to: 1) Utilize questioning and listening skills needed to facilitate advisors' reflection, 2) Be able to structure the interviewing process to ensure that issue(s) were addressed and the advisors were challenged to take their learning one-step further, 3) Negotiate the power balance, and 4) Engage in a transformative learning process. By conducting the interviews and becoming involved in the advisors' own transformative learning, the author believes that this whole interviewing process itself could serve as a complete training program necessary for advisors who have completed the initial PD program.

The self-reflective journal kept by the interviewer also indicated that the interviewer had to challenge her own existing values and beliefs as an advisor as the interviewees were themselves challenged by the author during the interviews. Much self-questioning occurred while keeping the journal and transformative learning could be observed. Moreover, in terms of skills, it became clear that the following interviewing skills (which can be considered to be a set of skills used in advising sessions) were intensively used in each session: Building rapport, active listening, metaviewing, linking, restating, questioning, empathizing, summarizing, challenging, intuiting, reflecting, goal-setting, giving feedback, asking for accountability (Kelly, 1996; Whitworth et al, 2007). In general, it is unlikely that an advisor will use all of the above skills intensively in one session with a student. However, as the interviewees in this study were highly reflective practitioners, the interviewer had to

incorporate many of the advising skills in one session. As such, each interview was energy-consuming and intense for the interviewer, perhaps resulting in a more powerful experience than for the interviewee.

Conclusion

The cases discussed in this study represent an attempt to introduce an intentionally structured reflective dialogue for advisors' professional development. Since the training focusing on experienced advisors is, after all, still in the early stages, the results and findings of this study are yet inconclusive and further research needs to be conducted. This could result in the production of a set of guidelines for conducting intentional reflective dialogue, which could include suggested procedures, purposes, strategies, and tools. By preparing such guidelines together with workshops and follow-up discussion forums among colleagues, it is hoped that advisors will be able to develop professionally by strengthening their skill-based and philosophical-based background. This study indicates that incorporating intentional reflective dialogue of this nature into a structured program could serve as an effective continuing PD activity.

Notes on the contributor

Satoko Kato holds a Master's degree (TESOL) from the Columbia University Graduate School of Education. She has worked as a learning advisor at Kanda University of International Studies and now holds the same position with Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages. Her area of expertise is the development of learner autonomy through providing courses and conducting one-to-one advising. She is currently engaged in establishing training courses for advisors.

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Appendix - The interview procedures and tips for interviewers: First Interview

((Interviewer=INT, Interviewee= A))

Interview Procedures	Tips for Interviewers
<p>1. Icebreaking talk <i>INT</i> intentionally asks Yes/No questions to <i>A</i> and initiates the talk. See what mood <i>A</i> is in today.</p> <p><i>INT</i> clarifies that the interview is intentionally structured and semi-formal. Explains what the interview is about and get permission from <i>A</i> for recording the session.</p>	<p>→ <i>INT</i> observes if <i>A</i> is cooperative and willing to reflect or not. Paying attention to <i>A</i>'s mood may help <i>INT</i> come up with interview questions later.</p> <p>→ <i>INT</i> tries to set the tone of the interview friendly but not too casual.</p>
<p>2. The Wheel of Learning Advising (WLA, see Figure1)</p> <p>1) <i>INT</i> explains the WLA activity and briefly mention what each category in the WLA means. <i>INT</i> asks <i>A</i> to complete the WLA and <i>INT</i> waits in silence until <i>A</i> completes the WLA To facilitate <i>A</i>'s internal dialogue.</p> <p>2) <i>INT</i> asks <i>A</i> to self-analyze the results of the WLA.</p>	<p>→ <i>INT</i> observes <i>A</i> carefully while completing the WLA. Filling in the WLA easily or taking time? Any observable non-verbal behaviors?</p>
<p>3. Start the intentional reflective dialogue (IRD) <i>INT</i> carefully listens to and observes the following three aspects when <i>A</i> is explaining the WLA:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Utterances: <i>INT</i> focuses on <i>A</i>'s values and visions, concerns, as well as words and things repeatedly, carefully, or quickly said. 2) Non-verbal behaviors: These may include a shift in <i>A</i>'s tone, pace, breathing, pauses, eye movements, facial expressions, body movements, etc. 3) Energy level: <i>INT</i> tries to get information about <i>A</i> through what is not observable. <i>INT</i> uses her intuition and see <i>A</i>'s lightness, darkness, tightness, looseness, tension, mood, atmosphere and energy level, etc. 	<p>→ <i>INT</i> starts the dialogue with a simple question such as "Could you explain your WLA to me?"</p> <p>→ <i>INT</i> does not need to ask many questions here. Let <i>A</i> explain the WLA and initiate the talk.</p> <p>→ It is often the case that reflective practitioners do not need much support here.</p> <p>→ However, use skills such as restating, rephrasing, mirroring, and summarizing in order to deepen <i>A</i>'s self-reflective process.</p> <p>Question examples:</p> <p>→ "You are using 'genuineness' in our conversation repeatedly. Did you notice? What does genuineness mean to you?"</p> <p>→ "There was a silence and you were closing your eyes before you started to answer my question. What was going on inside you?"</p> <p>→ "It seems as if you don't want to talk about this topic. Isn't your energy level going down each time we come to this particular topic? Is it okay for me to ask you why?"</p>

<p>4. Fixed questions: <i>INT</i> asks the same questions to all <i>A</i>s (fixed questions) as follows:</p> <p>Question examples: "What does your WLA look like to you as a whole?" "What are the qualities of a good advisor?" "If that is your ideal advisor, can you use a metaphor to describe where you are at now?" "If your WLA could talk and give you a message, what would it say to you?"</p>	<p>→ Asking the same questions to all <i>A</i>s may help <i>INT</i> to see how different/similar <i>A</i>s are. → Some of the fixed questions seem unusual which <i>A</i> might not encounter in daily conversations, thus sometimes allows <i>A</i> to find his/her real issues. If not, it will at least bring laughter to the conversation!</p>
<p>5. Getting new perspectives <i>(Before getting to this point, INT needs to find out <i>A</i>'s current perspectives and the issues <i>A</i> is facing.)</i> <i>INT</i> tries to guide <i>A</i> into a double-loop learning process where their existing values are challenged. This is often the most challenging part for <i>INT</i>.</p>	<p>→ <i>INT</i> may have to use skills such as challenging, confronting, metaviewing (getting a wider picture) to help <i>A</i> identify his/her current perspectives and get new insight. This process could potentially lead to an "aha" moment for <i>A</i>s.</p>
<p>This process sometimes brings discomfort to the conversation. When encountering such situation, <i>INT</i> asks where <i>A</i>'s discomfort is coming from. This is the first step of getting new perspectives.</p>	<p>Question example: → "You said you sometimes do not let students try what they want to try and recommend other things to do when you see a poor learning plan. You don't want to be accused by your students saying 'you didn't tell me it was wrong!' You admitted that you are afraid of being called an 'inexperienced advisor'. Do you want to keep having this fear?"</p>
<p>6. Clarifying future visions <i>INT</i> asks <i>A</i>'s future vision and what might bring <i>A</i> closer to that vision. Clarify what <i>A</i> wants to do to improve him/herself as an advisor. <i>INT</i> tries to induce <i>A</i>'s action by asking <i>A</i> to set an actionable plan (things which are achievable).</p>	<p>Question examples: → "Among the elements you have mentioned, which one do you think you would like to actually try in order to grow as an advisor?" "How will you do this?" "By when would you like to do it?" "Could you let me know how things are going occasionally?"</p>
<p>7. Wrapping up <i>INT</i> summarizes the interview and gives feedback to <i>A</i>. Asks <i>A</i> who does he/she thinks about the interview.</p>	<p>→ Giving feedback to <i>A</i> and getting feedback from <i>A</i> is effective to clarify where both parties stand. Leads to mutual understanding.</p>
<p>8. Self-reflective journal entry After the interview, <i>INT</i> writes a self-reflective journal to reflect on the interview.</p>	<p>→ <i>INT</i> writes about the following: 1) The overall impression of the interview. 2) The critical moment in the interview. 3) Words repeatedly used by the interviewee (to highlight the hidden issues). 4) Self-evaluation (to reflect on whether the author could conduct the intentional reflective dialogue effectively).</p>
<p>9. Preparing for the second interview Before the second interview, <i>INT</i> reviews the first interview by herself for preparation.</p>	

The Influence of Learning Beliefs in Peer-advising Sessions: Promoting Independent Language Learning

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Abstract

This qualitative study was conducted in order to explore interaction between advisors and advisees in peer-advising sessions conducted with a view of promoting independent language study. The data was collected through observation, documentation, and interviews with a newly-trained and relatively inexperienced student peer-advisor. The data was transcribed and coded for closer analysis. The study revealed that the advice which the student advisor gave to peers was very much influenced by her own language study experience and beliefs, especially with regard to grammar-focused study and time-management methods. Moreover, the data offered a number of interesting observations, such as a feeling of relatedness between peers, and a conflict between being strict and being generous. In this article, the author will discuss the areas in which the student advisor's own beliefs were most reflected in her advising. Other observations from the data will also be highlighted.

Keywords: peer advising, beliefs, qualitative study

Self-access language learning is implemented in many different ways around the world and has been a widely used approach to encourage learner autonomy (Gardner & Miller, 1999). Language counseling or advising is a growing field of interest which has recently emerged as a promising approach to support self-access language learning (Rubin, 2007). Language counselors (also called learning advisors⁵) play a unique role, which is fairly distinct from conventional classroom teachers. Some of the differences between classroom teachers and self-access counselors are illustrated as follows (adapted from Gardner & Miller, 1999, p. 182):

- Teachers are assessors of students. Counselors discuss with learners different ways to self-monitor their progress.
- Teachers are instructors/organizers. Counselors are reflective listeners.
- Teachers use a variety of teaching aids (board, overhead projector, video).

⁵ In this article, the term "advisor" is used.

Counselors demonstrate to learners how they can use materials and equipment.

- Teachers monitor a whole class and look for common language problems.

Counselors discuss on a one-to-one basis individual language problems.

Many studies have investigated the role of language learning advisors. In many cases these are either full-time advisors or classroom instructors assigned several hours of language advising in self-access centers (Karlsson, Kjisik & Nordlund, 2007; Mozzon-McPherson, 2007; Reinders, 2007). Yet, there seems to be little research investigating peer advising, in which student advisors advise fellow students. This small-scale qualitative study attempts to look into happenings during the peer advising sessions at the time when the author's institution initiated a student advisor program at the self-access center.

There are a number of perceived benefits of peer-advising. Peer advisors are potentially friendlier, more sensitive to the cultural background of learners, and better able to create a supportive and collaborative learning atmosphere than teachers taking an advisor's role. In addition, a number of studies suggest that peer advising can be beneficial for not only advisees but also advisors, since peer advisors will learn significantly from teaching, gain a sense of responsibility and become more reflective in their own learning by giving feedback to others' learning (Gardner & Miller; 1999, Kao, forthcoming; Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006; Rollinson, 2005).

There are also some challenges for peer-advising. One of the anticipated challenges mentioned in the studies above is that some students may not be easily convinced that students can be as good as teachers when it comes to advising. Both peer advisors and advisees may need to have the benefits of peer advising explained to them. Also, peer advisors need to acquire skills for effective advising as well as in depth understanding of independent learning in addition to language learning. Moreover, the role of advisors should be clarified in order to avoid authoritative teaching attitudes to peers. These research studies suggest that effective training is essential to clarify advisors' roles and maximize the benefits of peer advising.

The issue of how advisors' own experience and beliefs may impact their actual advising has not been widely investigated, but much related work has been conducted in the field of learner and teacher beliefs. Learner beliefs about second language learning have been studied to a large extent especially since Horwitz's

Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was introduced (Dörnyei, 2005). Using the BALLI, Kern (1995) conducted a study which compares students' and teachers' beliefs about French learning. The study suggests that teachers' beliefs are one of the factors that affect their students' beliefs. The thorough review of research works on language teachers' beliefs by Borg (2003) suggest that teachers' beliefs are influenced by their prior language learning experience and the teacher education that they received, and that these beliefs are actually affecting their classroom practice. However, although one study has investigated advisors' learning styles (Uhlik & Jones, 2008), little is known about how the beliefs of advisors - including peer advisors - affect the advice they give to their advisees. This study tries to explore this issue by examining the observation data of peer advising sessions and interviewing a student advisor.

The questions to be addressed in this paper are the following: (1) What does the student advisor choose to focus on in her advising sessions? (2) What does the student advisor believe about language learning and advising? (3) How do the student advisor's beliefs influence her advising?

Context

The English Consultation Room (ECR) offers a one-on-one advising service to promote students' self-study in English. The ECR is located in the Self-access Center at Soka University in Japan. Soka University is a private university with approximately 8,000 undergraduate students majoring in Law, Economics, Letters, Business and Engineering. The World Language Center has offered English courses across departments since 1999, and at the same time, runs various self-access facilities. Those facilities include a chat space for basic English conversation practice, English discussion groups on current global issues, tutoring programs for various foreign languages, a Writing Center, and a library with language learning resources. The ECR was established in 2006 with a view to guiding students in how to utilize these rich resources on campus effectively.

Students visit the ECR on a voluntary basis in order to seek answers to various questions from how to practice speaking in English to how to prepare for English courses. Questions related to test preparation are those most frequently asked, such as

how to improve a TOEFL⁶ score for study abroad or how to improve a TOEIC⁷ score in order to enhance a C.V. and improve job prospects.

Since its initiation in 2006, the number of visitors to the ECR has steadily increased each year. Two years after inception, with one full-time advisor, the rate of use stood at over 85% for four semesters consecutively. In 2009, the administrative decision was made to employ two student advisors to meet the increasing demands for creating individualized learning pathways. Peer advising was selected primarily for financial reasons. However, the fact that peer tutors were already commonly employed at other self-access facilities on campus and perceived as highly successful in helping peers with independent learning was one of the central factors supporting the administrative decision. The peer tutors at the chat space, for instance, are serving as role models who represent successful “*senpais*” (this term will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section) who acquired a high level of English proficiency through study abroad experience and their own hard work. The positions are always competitive.

When recruiting peer advisors for paid positions, applicants were considered based on factors such as their experiences of self-access language learning on campus, TOEFL and TOEIC scores and test preparation experiences, and seniority (applicants should be senior students or graduate students).

Participants

Eiko⁸, one of the student advisors at the ECR, was a senior undergraduate student at the university and majored in English Literature. At the time of the observation, she had received training two months before and had experienced about 25 one-on-one advising sessions. The training sessions were conducted for three hours on two days and given by the author, who was the full-time advisor at the ECR. The topics covered in the training include learning about the concept of independent learning, familiarizing the peer advisor with university facilities, learning techniques for effective question formation, and performing role-plays based on scenarios. The

⁶ The Test of English as a Foreign Language, or TOEFL, is a registered trademark of Educational Testing Service (ETS).

⁷ The Test of English for International Communication, or TOEIC, is a registered trademark of Educational Testing Service (ETS).

⁸ Eiko is a pseudonym.

role of advisors, as distinct from teachers, as suggested in Gardner & Miller (1999), was especially emphasized. In addition, the values of advising, such as unconditional positive regard and empathic understating, as suggested in Kelly (1996), were also discussed in the meetings. After the initial training, the student advisors were assigned advising sessions for three hours per week, in addition to a one hour weekly meeting with the author to discuss the sessions as follow-up. There were two student advisors hired, but only Eiko participated in the study since the other student advisor took a leave for illness.

Two sessions were randomly chosen and observed by the author.

Advisee A was a freshman student majoring in Business. She would like to improve her TOEFL iBT⁹ or ITP¹⁰ score in order to study abroad. The observation was conducted during her third session with Eiko.

Advisee B was a senior student majoring in English Literature. Like Eiko, B was in the midst of searching for a job. It was also her third session with Eiko and B was studying in order to improve her TOEIC score.

Data Collection Methods

Firstly, in order to examine the actual peer advising session, participant observation (Hatch, 2002; Spradley, 1980) was conducted. Two of Eiko's advising sessions were observed, each lasting for 30 minutes. Data was not obtained from audio recording, but from field notes of the observation, and from session reports which Eiko recorded during the sessions, as well as from the previous sessions she had had with the two advisees.

Further primary data was obtained from formal or semi-structured interviews (Hatch, 2002; Spradley, 1979) with Eiko conducted by the author, in order to explore Eiko's experience and reflection about her advising process. Some general or 'grand tour' questions (e.g. "Could you describe a typical session?) as well as guided questions (e.g. "Did you feel something different when you talk with your peers of the same age or younger students?) were prepared, but for the large part the interview remained open, following the lead of the informants as the interview proceeded. The interviews were conducted two months after the observations. Prior to the interviews, there was an informal interview or conversation (not recorded) for one hour which

⁹ Internet-Based Test

¹⁰ Institutional Testing Program

also provided some information about Eiko's feelings toward her advising experience. The interviews lasted for 45 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Methods of Analysis

The interview transcriptions provided the primary source of the analysis. Rather than looking for parts related to the student advisor's beliefs, inductive analysis was conducted in which data is examined thoroughly and pieces of information are gathered together into a meaningful theme which emerges from the data (Hatch, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The procedures suggested in Hatch (2002, p. 162) follow nine steps involving: reading the data and identifying frames of analysis, creating domains based on semantic relationships and assigning them a code, finding relationships, deciding if the domains are supported by the data, and so on. In this study, each of Eiko's utterances in the interview were coded and categorized into domains. Within the data, parts which reflected Eiko's beliefs toward advising were given prominence.

Presentation of the Findings

Based on the data gathered, much could be said, but this article presents some of the main points of interest. First, there were clear connections between Eiko's beliefs and the actual advice she gave; namely, that about grammar-focused study and time-management methods. Also, there was a point when Eiko deliberately chose not to reflect her own experience when advising. In addition to highlighting how Eiko's beliefs were influencing her advising practice, the observations and interviews also revealed a number of other aspects about the experience of peer advising. Interestingly, there was some evidence that Eiko felt more comfortable with peers of a similar age, rather than with younger students. Eiko's reflection of peer advising as a learning experience is also discussed.

Eiko's beliefs about grammar-focused study

Even though the goals of Advisee A and Advisee B were different, interestingly, Eiko recommended the same resource book in both sessions observed: a book which was written specifically for the TOEFL ITP grammar section.

In the last session, Advisee A had promised to study grammar. After that, Advisee A went to the library, but she could not find the book Eiko suggested. Advisee A borrowed a different textbook, but she did not like the textbook. Thus, Eiko showed the textbook on the computer screen to make sure that Advisee A could see what the textbook looked like and they decided to try again.

On the other hand, Advisee B was studying for TOEIC exams. In the session observed, Advisee B mentioned that she was weak at listening and reading sections; however, she and the advisor agreed to focus on grammar study by using the same textbook above. This might be because Advisee B mentioned that she could not spend as much time as she would have liked to on study for TOEIC since they had talked in the last session.

In the interview, Eiko mentioned that she strongly believed that grammar-focused study was very effective in improving test scores fast. Excerpt 1 below suggests that Eiko believed that it would be easier to focus on grammar and improve the score of that section first, before focusing on reading and listening sections, which would take longer.

Excerpt 1 (from interview)¹¹

Eiko: I think that the fastest way to improve the test score is to start from the grammar section. I used “TOEIC Magazine” and tried to finish the grammar sections in 15 minutes. I repeated this procedure for approximately ten times using the same textbook. …After I became able to score high on the grammar section constantly, I started studying for listening and reading sections. …We should learn the basic grammar first. …However, I also wonder if this strategy would be as effective as it was for me for other students at different levels. If a student has no basic knowledge about English grammar, I think it might be confusing for him or her if I recommend this strategy. I am aware that it’s important to take advisees’ level of proficiency into consideration. In my case, the strategy was very effective.

¹¹ All excerpts from interviews were originally in Japanese and translated into English by the author.

Even though she was aware that the way she studied was effective for her, she was not sure if the same would apply to other students, especially to students with a lower level of proficiency; however, because she believes it strongly, she often suggests grammar-focused study in advising. This observation is supported by reports from other sessions conducted by Eiko.

Time management methods

References as to how to manage time effectively were most frequently mentioned by Eiko in the interview. This indicates that she believes time management is an important aspect in advising. In both of the observed sessions, Eiko asked advisees if the plan had worked for them since the last time they talked. Unfortunately, it did not work in either case, so Eiko continued to examine the reasons why the plans did not work. In both sessions, Eiko asked about advisees' extra-curricular activities. Eiko's conclusions concerning Advisee A was that A needed to clarify her goals once again.

In the case of Advisee B, Eiko found that B had been involved in too many extra-curricular activities and therefore could not devote a large amount of time to studying for the TOEIC. Thus, they negotiated and decided that B would focus on grammar study. In the interview, Eiko frequently talked about the need to reduce extra-curricular activities in order to spend more time on studying, as well as the need for a strong sense of determination for B to achieve her goals. In addition, Eiko confirmed that she would always ask and take notes of advisees' extra-curricular activities, such as part-time jobs and clubs, as she thinks it is an important factor when advising about time management.

While she acknowledges the importance of time management in advising, Eiko also realizes the difficulties in advising on time management. Her comments in the interview show that she was debating over the most effective way to help students to become independent learners especially in terms of time management, as shown in Excerpts 2 and 3 below.

Excerpt 2 (from interview)

Eiko: If the advisee has visited before, I make sure to ask them if the plan is working or not since the last session. When they said no, I try not to make

them feel guilty. ...Before, I heard some advisees say “I felt hesitant to come back here for advising.” I think it is natural for them to feel hesitant when they could not study as they planned. Also, it is not surprising that they fail, because most likely it is their first experience of planning their study by themselves. [However] when advisees come to sessions for the third time or more, some advisees become accustomed to say “I could not do as planned again.” Then it becomes a habit. Even though we do not want to intimidate students, we certainly want to avoid accepting such attitudes by saying “it is OK even if you could not study as planned.” In such occasions, I think we should remind them of their initial goals. The third session with an advisee might be the time to establish a good rhythm of self study in order to achieve their goals.

Eiko was still a novice advisor and had not had much experience with repeat advisees. She acknowledged that she felt more challenged with advisees who visit for the third session and beyond, compared to the first and second sessions. Especially when the advisees could not study as they initially planned, how to deal with the situation was a challenge for her. She did not want to intimidate students, but, at the same time, she wanted to avoid allowing advisees stay in the same situation.

When asked how Eiko herself managed time when she was studying for TOEFL, she shared an experience about one of her seniors’ strict admonishments that kept her going, as shown in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3 (from interview)

Eiko: “Oh, you are doing right”. To say this does not always mean that it is good for advisees. Sometimes they need a little pressure. ...One day, one of my seniors said to me, “Eiko, you cannot get where you want to be if you continue doing as you do now.” I was hurt and felt pressured. “What should I do?” I struggled. However, I am here today because of that strict advice she gave me. ...Still, I am not sure if this applies to others. I don’t know what is best for advisees.

After the advice from a senior, Eiko felt the strong need for changing her time management strategies. She reduced her extra-curricular activities and saved more time for studying. As a result, she obtained the target score on TOEFL and achieved her goal to study abroad. However, as mentioned in Excerpt 2, because she does not want to intimidate students, she decided not to be very strict about advisees keeping promises to follow study plans in the initial stages. At the time of the interview, she was debating whether she should be as strict as her senior, or be more generous in order to encourage peers. The fact that she encourages behavior which has been successful for her, but not uncritically, as she is aware that it might not be appropriate for everyone's situation, and of the need to be supportive, may be influenced by the training she had. This supports Borg's (2003) finding that a teacher's beliefs are influenced by their own experience and by the training they received.

Senpai-kohai relationships

When asked about advising peers, contrary to the author's assumptions, Eiko said she felt more comfortable with peers of her own age compared to talking with younger students. In Japanese culture, the younger or junior members (called *kohai*) at school or work respect the elder or senior ones (called *senpai*). It is usually a *senpai* that teaches and gives advice to a *kohai*. Thus, when employing peer advisors, it was expected that the student advisors would feel comfortable talking with *kohais*, but might feel hesitant about giving advice to their *senpais* or even peers of their own age. However, in the observation, Eiko seemed more nervous with Advisee A (who is Eiko's *kohai*, a younger student), but seemed more friendly with Advisee B (who is Eiko's peer, of the same age). In the interview, Eiko confirmed that she felt more comfortable with peers because with them she could relate to her own situation. As a result, she felt that she understood Advisee B's situation more easily (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4 (from interview)

Eiko: She (Advisee B) was in the middle of job-hunting, like me. I understood very well that she needs a good TOEIC score. That's why I felt closer to her and I could talk to her like a friend. ...I could relate to her, and

say things like “yeah, I am a fourth year student too, so I understand your situation.” I think it is very good.

The student advisor positions at the ECR are open only to senior students, in order to avoid intimidation in giving advice to *senpai*; thus, the number of sessions with *senpai* is relatively small. One of the limitations of this study is that no data is available to enable us to examine how Eiko would feel when she had advising sessions with her *senpai* (older students). In terms of advising *kohai*, Eiko might have felt under pressure, as a *senpai* who should serve as a role model, to give good advice to younger students. Still, I think the student advisors should be senior students, since *senpai* advising *kohai* is more acceptable in Japanese culture than *kohai* advising *senpai*.

Peer advising as an opportunity to grow as a learner

At the end of the interview, Eiko mentioned that peer advising gave her the opportunity to grow as a learner by having to analyze the advisees’ needs, negotiate study plans, and give advice as best she could in as little as 30 minutes. Excerpt 5 is from Eiko’s response to a question in the interview about any changes in herself through peer advising experience.

Excerpt 5 (from interview)

Eiko: I think there are mainly two things which I gained through advising. First, I think I acquired the skills such as building rapport, analyzing the person’s needs, and providing necessary information as much as possible, when meeting with someone new, in the very limited period of time. I learned how opening my own mind helps advisees to open their mind. ... I learned these communication skills by making many mistakes. The other skill is negotiating plans based on their needs. When a student comes to advising, they have some sort of problem. But, sometimes they are not aware of where the problem lies. I learned the dynamics of helping them to realize their own problems by asking effective questions. ... When we find the problem, we discuss possible solutions. I think I acquired the skills to suggest

plans as options promptly so that the advisees can think and choose by themselves. Well, more properly, I want to develop such skills.

Those skills mentioned in Eiko's comments are advanced skills which require higher level thinking and considerable practice. In the conversation preceding the interview, she said that the experience was invaluable in terms of job-hunting because she came to realize her own strengths through this advising experience. As her trainer, it was my great pleasure to learn that Eiko had not only acquired broader understanding about independent language learning, but that peer advising had also given her opportunities to gain skills that could potentially benefit her in the rest of her life.

Conclusion

In this very small-scale qualitative study, it was observed that the student advisor's own language learning experience and beliefs influenced her advising. In this particular advisor's case, her beliefs about grammar-focused study and time-management methods were reflected in the advice she gave to peers. However, it should be noted that these beliefs were not always accepted uncritically and directly transferred to her advising practice, but that she reflected on and engaged with the beliefs while deciding what approach to take with each learner. Also, it was observed that the student advisor did not feel intimidated about advising peers of her own age, compared to those younger than her, and while basing her advice on her own experience or beliefs was inevitable, it was not necessarily harmful. Sometimes advisees benefit from listening to the advisors' own experiences and feel closer to the advisors. At the same time, it is also important for an advisor to be objective and to be aware of more options to present to advisees in order to be able to cope with a variety of different learners.

This study is limited in the way that the observation was conducted. Since the author trained and supervised the student advisor, the level of involvement is an issue. Also, an examination of a single student advisor's case is certainly not sufficient to make general conclusions. However, struggles like those faced by Eiko are also shared by professional advisors. Opportunities such as peer observation and information exchange among advisors could be beneficial for professional

development. Further research investigating the impact of advisors' beliefs and experiences using a larger sample is necessary.

Finally, the student advisor's comments on her positive changes through her advising experience supports the previous research on the benefits of peer advising programs; peer advising would seem to offer the participants, both advisors and advisees, potential for growth and great opportunities for learning. Interviewing peer advisees and exploring how peer advising impacts their perspectives compared to teacher-advisors are areas which could be further investigated.

Notes on the contributor

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Macro-and Micro-Language Learning Counseling: An Autoethnographic Account

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Abstract

This article describes an example of the counselor's role in a relatively small Self-Access Center (SAC) for language learning in universities in Japan. The author has been involved with establishing and running two SACs in Japanese universities. The study used autoethnography as its research method to look closely at the counselor's role. This study eventually helped the author to analyze the counseling she has been providing and to realize that the counselor is required to provide not only macro-counseling but also micro-counseling. Micro-counseling consists of short, informal interactions with learners which connect the learner to elements in SACs, such as teaching assistants, other language learners, and language learning materials. These micro-counseling encounters can help to create a secure space which encourages learners to engage in macro-counseling sessions which support their language learning.

Keywords: counseling, advising, autoethnography

In the last two decades, the number of self-access centers for language learning has drastically increased all over the world. In Japan, many universities have established SACs in the last decade. I have been involved with starting and running two SACs in different Japanese universities: one started in the 2004 school year, and the other in 2008. Human resources are limited to one teacher and one student teaching assistant (TA) in each SAC per day in both of the SACs. As Gardner and Miller (1999) suggest, teachers have to play various roles in SACs and I have been involved in managing both of the SACs, while also simultaneously working as a teacher and a counselor. The role of a counselor involves a great deal of work at both of the SACs, and I believe counseling is an essential part of making a SAC more successful at promoting learner autonomy.

Much of the research on counseling for language learning has been focusing on what takes place inside the counseling session itself (for instance, Kelly, 1996; Reinders, 2008), which is very important because the quality of this interaction determines whether counseling really helps language learners to become autonomous. However, little research has focused on what brings language learners to counseling sessions. In the present study, I investigate how counselors encourage language

learners to seek help and take part in counseling sessions and suggest what kind of contact may encourage language learners to decide to take part in language counseling sessions. I will describe my own experiences as a counselor using an autoethnographical approach.

Key terms: Advising and Counseling

Advising and counseling are often used interchangeably in the field of language learning. Kelly (1996) presented a framework for language counseling for learner autonomy and used the term, counseling which she defined as “a form of therapeutic dialogue that enables an individual to manage a problem” (Kelly 1996, p. 94). Gardner and Miller (1999) also used the term ‘counseling’ in their book on self-access explaining different types of counseling at various settings. Egan (1994) discusses empathy in counseling, which involves listening to clients, understanding them and communicating this understanding to them so that they might understand themselves more fully. While some researchers use the term ‘counseling,’ others use the term ‘advising’. Reinders (2008) uses the term ‘language advising’, calling it a form of support whose purpose is to encourage the development of independent learning skills.

Mynard (2010) uses the term “advising in language learning” and explains that the approach to advising may vary in each institution. The definitions of counseling and advising overlap with each other, and also may vary depending on institutions, but there seems to be consistency that educators who are involved with SACs aim to support language learners to become autonomous and to acquire certain skills in their target languages. Since counseling in language learning is relatively new in the research field, researchers may use different terms depending on their preferences and their focuses.

In the present study, I use the term “counseling” since I believe a great part of my role as a counselor needs to deal with language learners’ affective factors. I would like to focus on empathy, listening to language learners, and understanding them in the process of their becoming autonomous language learners.

Background of Two SACs

I was fortunate enough to be involved with establishing two SACs in Japanese universities. Furthermore, those two SACs are alike in many respects, which helped me analyze what has been successful in encouraging learners to use the SACs.

Table 1 shows the biographical data for both SACs that I believe is necessary to understand the background of the study. Both SACs are located in relatively small universities and both cater for English major students. About 150-180 students are enrolled in each year. I teach four to five classes a week and work at a SAC for over 18 hours per week. There is always one undergraduate teaching assistant usually with experience of studying abroad and high English proficiency (hereafter TA). The English proficiency of the students varies from 200 to over 900 TOEIC or 300 to 600 TOEFL, but the majority of the first year students are low beginners without specific reasons to study English.

Table 1. Biographical data of the two SACs

	Nagoya Gakuin University	Tokoha Gakuen University
Opening hours	Monday - Friday 10:30 am - 6:00pm	Monday –Friday 9:00am - 6:00pm
Size	30 seats	30 to 35 seats (including three sofas)
Number of students enrolled at the university	3500 Three faculties (including foreign language with 180 students taking an English-related major)	2000 Three faculties (including foreign language with 150 students taking an English-related major)
Main users	English-related major students	English-related major students
The number of SAC users per day	40 students per day	30 students per day
Usage	100 % voluntary	100% voluntary
My involvement	4 years (2004-2007)	3.5 years (2008-now)
My roles at the university	Lecturer Teacher (4 classes) Managing the SAC	Lecturer Teacher (5.5 classes) Managing the SAC
SAC human resources	One teacher-counselor (myself) Undergraduate students teaching assistants (TA) Two graduate students teaching assistants while I teach classes	Two teacher-counselors (including myself) One administrative staff member Undergraduate teaching assistants
Language used in counseling	Japanese	Japanese
Main user interest area	Studying abroad	Extensive reading

Learning and teaching materials	Very limited	Very limited
Technology-based materials	None, but a few computers available	A web based computer software program called ALCNet Academy 2 is available and students can get credit when they achieve the required points. They can use computers at the SAC or in the computer rooms. 9 computers available

Methodology: Autoethnography

In order to reflect and analyze what I have been doing to encourage language learners to seek help and take part in counseling sessions, I used autoethnography (Ellis, 2004) as the research method. Autoethnography is a research method of social research that allows the author to be a researcher and a participant. Burnard (2007) claims that in autoethnography the author becomes the ‘subject’ of the study.

According to Smith (2005) “[b]y using autoethnography, researchers can use their experiences, together with those of other participants, to complement their research.” (p. 71). It allows the author to describe and systematically analyze her experience in order to understand cultural phenomenon. Considering the nature of autoethnography, I believe it could help me to reflect on my experience as a counselor, so I have documented autoethnographic stories, and read all the research notes that I have kept for the last seven years, specifically entries related to counseling. I also added extra stories reflecting on what I had been doing before, after and during counseling sessions.

A SAC is a complex interactional space, and each encounter taking place there is affected by numerous elements including the specific context and the various participants. I believe this is particularly important to be aware of when examining counseling encounters. It is impossible to discuss counseling at a SAC without considering the context: who the counselor is, what the relationship is between the language learner and the counselor, and when and how counseling is conducted. In addition, the form and nature of reality is interpreted and experienced by people in interactions with each other. I am part of that knowledge and not external to it. I believe each counselor has meaningful experiences and that these experiences are rich

resources needed to understand counseling itself. Throughout my seven-year experience establishing and running SACs, I have had numerous counseling experiences. In order to reflect on my experience as a counselor and analyze what encourages language learners to take part in counseling sessions, I consider autoethnography to be a suitable approach for the present study.

I would also like to acknowledge some criticisms of autoethnography itself and the present study. There exist criticisms of autoethnography because of the nature of the data used and the evaluation of that data. Since the main source of data used in autoethnographies is from personal experience, it is often criticized for being biased. In addition, autoethnographers “are at risk of being overly narcissistic and self-indulgent” (Holt, 2003, p. 19). The evaluation of autoethnography has also been one of the major critiques because it is often evaluated in the positivism framework even though it is grounded in postmodern philosophy. The evaluation system is still at the developmental stage and there may not be clear criteria, so it is often criticized for “either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011) if there is a paradigm conflict between authors and readers. I have also faced a dilemma about whether it was appropriate to call the present study an autoethnography. However, as Ellis (2004) suggests that we may be able to judge the value of autoethnographies on the usefulness of the stories rather than only on accuracy. I was able to reflect on my role as the counselor and I believe it could be one approach for counselors to share what occurs before, after, in-between, and during counseling sessions.

Language Learners at the Two SACs

In the institutions I have worked in, only a limited number of students have specific reasons or a purpose to study English. Some happened to choose English as their major by chance - they actually wanted to major in another subject; some happened to pass the entrance exam so decided to come; or for others, the location was good, so even if English was not an ideal major for them, they chose it. Others chose English as their major, but do not seem to have any clear purpose for studying it. These students tend to focus on their TOEIC score but since they have no urgent reasons to get high scores on the test, it takes some time for them to start language

learning on their own. They seem to prioritize the completion of assignments from the classes they take.

Drawing on my seven year experience at two relatively similar SACs and by examining my research notes and autoethnographical stories written for the present study I have categorized SAC users into four groups.

Language Learners 1

The first group, Language Learners 1 (LL-1), have high motivation, know what they want, have language learning goals and are autonomous learners already. They know it is useful to ask for help, so they use counseling sessions when necessary.

Language Learners 2

Language Learners 2 (LL-2) are a group of students who accompany LL-1 students to the SACs, but do not have clear reasons for visiting the SACs themselves.

Language Learners 3

Language Learners 3 (LL-3) students do use the SAC for purposes such as checking out extensive reading materials, TOEIC and TOEFL textbooks, using speaking practice services, or the web based training program, but they do not speak to counselors or teaching assistants.

Language Learners 4

Language Learners 4 (LL-4) are students who never use the SACs. This could be because they are not aware of the existence of the SACs, they do not have motivation to learn English, they do not need any help from the SACs, or they hesitate to enter the SACs.

In this paper, I would like to focus on how a counselor's interactions with LL-2 and LL-3 students (i.e. learners who use the SACs, but the purpose for visiting is not for attending counseling sessions) can encourage them to make more use of the counseling opportunities available.

Data Interpretations

Macro-counseling and micro-counseling sessions

Based on my autoethnographical data, my research notes from the last seven years and reflecting on autoethnographical stories, I found that counseling sessions could be divided into two levels: macro-counseling and micro-counseling. Macro-counseling sessions are formal counseling sessions where language learners have some specific problems to talk about to counselors. They are usually ready to talk to counselors.

On the other hand, micro-counseling sessions refer to casual contact with counselors or TAs, varying from 30 seconds to 15 minutes or more. They can be very informal forms of contact, but can eventually encourage learners to engage in macro-counseling sessions. Some language learners may need to communicate with counselors or TAs in order to get to know the people and the place first before they come up to participate in a macro-counseling session.

In a previous study (Shibata, 2010), I attempted to investigate how language learners voluntarily and autonomously use a self-access center to learn English in a Japanese EFL context and suggested the necessity of an “acclimation period”, until language learners are able to use a SAC with feeling comfortable, accepted, and competent. For some language learners it takes some time to finally approach and talk to a counselor even in their native language. I realized the counselor is required to provide not only macro-counseling but also micro-counseling connecting the elements necessary in the SACs, such as TAs, other language learners, and language learning materials, and creating a secure space for learners to have macro-counseling sessions. Many language learners seem to contact counselors or TAs constantly (micro-counseling), then finally decide to engage in counseling sessions (macro-counseling), and continue studying with while drawing on both micro and macro counseling sessions toward their language learning goals (Figure 1).

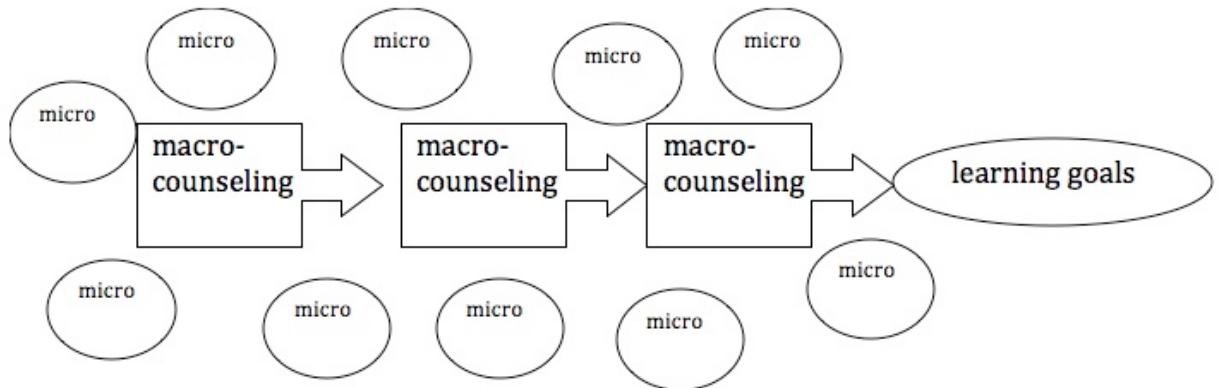


Figure 1 Micro-counseling to bring language learners to macro-counseling

I would like to present three examples in order to share the characteristics of a shift from casual encounters to language learning counseling sessions in the cases of LL-2 and LL-3 students. In order to protect the identity of the students, dates and locations are not specified and names have been changed.

Case 1 (LL-2)

At the beginning of April, when the academic year starts in Japan, Yumiko, a first year student, visited the SAC. Yumiko was very cheerful and friendly to her friends, but she seemed reluctant to talk to me, a teacher-counselor. Yumiko came to the SAC with her friend, Takako, who wanted to ask how to study for TOEFL. Yumiko continuously used the SAC, but she never talked to me, just sitting next to Takako, who needed to talk to me. Whenever I had a counseling session with Takako, Yumiko was there. I assumed Yumiko also wanted to talk to me about something, but I didn't push her. Instead, I always greeted her, and whenever I talked to Takako, I tried to include Yumiko in the conversation and made eye contact with not only Takako but also Yumiko. I tried to create the atmosphere where we all three talked to each other. In July, before the summer vacation started, Yumiko finally approached me and asked what she could do to get a high enough score on TOEFL to be chosen as an exchange student. It took her three months to get used to the place and to see who I was.

Case 2 (LL-3)

Kenji always checked out a few graded readers. When he was looking for books to read in front of the bookshelf, I asked what kind books he was looking for, and we shared some information about the books we both read. Then I recommended some books. We always had some communication at the SAC related to extensive reading. One day, when he came to the SAC to return the books he checked out, I was in charge of checking the check-out file. I asked “How are you enjoying extensive reading?” Then he said “I’m not sure I am improving or not. Can I talk to you about my English skills when I have time?” I said he could come back anytime he wanted. A few days later, he came to the SAC and we had a counseling session.

Case 3 (LL-3)

Daisuke always used the SAC, but he never talked to anybody there. I always asked if he had any questions, and told him he could ask me anytime. He just nodded or thanked me. One day when I asked if he had any questions, he actually did. It was a grammatical question. I sat next to him and showed him how to look it up in a dictionary and where to look in a grammar book. After that, he asked me if he could ask me about how he could be an English teacher. We had a counseling session then.

I reflected on what encouraged language learners to seek help at the SAC, and considered micro-counseling sessions to be one possible approach. In this paper I would like to focus on micro-counseling. Firstly, I will examine when, where, and how micro-counseling takes place and then discuss two major roles that micro-counseling plays: removing invisible obstacles and increasing confidence in what students have been doing.

When, where, and how micro-counseling takes place

Micro-counseling sessions are language learners’ casual contacts with counselors or TAs which may encourage them to take part in macro-counseling sessions. Micro-counseling could take place in various settings. For instance, when language learners accompany other users to the SAC, I make the most of the chance to interact with them casually and give them some time to see who I am. I also inform them that they can take part in macro-counseling sessions whenever they are ready (see case 1 above). When the learners engage in other SAC activities, such as

checking out books, signing up for conversation practice sessions, and web-based training, submitting applications for tests, or receiving test results, I always ask how they are or if they have any questions (see cases 2 and 3 above). In most of the cases, students eventually participate in macro-counseling sessions.

Removing invisible obstacles

I realized language learners struggled with many invisible obstacles. In the previous study (Shibata, 2010), I attempted to investigate how language learners voluntarily and autonomously use a SAC to learn English in a Japanese EFL context. The results suggested that language learners at a SAC in a Japanese EFL context become autonomous and continue to learn outside classrooms, based on self determination, receiving support from counselors, student teaching assistants, the SAC itself, learning materials, and especially the other language learners who use the SAC. Furthermore, the necessity of an “acclimation period” is suggested, until language learners are able to use a SAC feeling comfortable, accepted, and competent. In the interviews (Shibata, 2010), the participants often mentioned some of the following: “I feel bad using the teachers’ time”, “I have to be good enough to ask teachers”, “I don’t want to bother you and take your time”. Because of their Japanese cultural background, the learners respect teachers and think they should not waste teachers’ time. The fact that I also teach classes is likely to affect how students understand my role and it seems to be difficult for them to consider me as a counselor in the SAC, not a teacher. Many learners are likely to decide what kinds of questions they will ask depending on the classes teachers teach. For example, if the students have a specific question in mind such as how to study for TOEIC or TOEFL, they may think they can only ask these questions to teachers responsible for teaching the TOEIC or TOEFL classes.

Some learners mention that they will ask me about how to study after they have studied a little more, which suggests that they believe they need to be “good enough” to talk to counselors because if they come to counseling sessions, they have to use counselors’ “precious time”. I realized I needed to eliminate the students’ invisible obstacles. One possible approach was to talk to each student face-to-face more often, and let them know me, the place, and the system or services until they are ready to take part in counseling sessions and let them believe I never think they would waste my time. I consider such numerous casual contacts to be “micro-counseling”.

Some learners such as the learner in case 1 (LL-2) come to the SAC with their friends and do not engage in any specific language learning activities. I assume that following their friends means at least that they are interested in the SAC, but they cannot enter it alone or they hesitate to visit it without a specific study purpose. I talk to these learners casually, and sometimes encourage them to come back anytime, telling them some example usages of the SAC. They gradually learn what kind of place it is and often end up using the SAC more. Once a learner said, “I saw you talking to other students and explaining to someone whose English level is lower than me and you were so patient, so I thought you would help me”. It suggests that some learners want to know or need to know who I am and what the SAC is before they talk to me.

Increasing confidence in what they have been doing

The other aspect of micro-counseling is to support language learners in feeling confident in what they are doing. Once learners discuss their study plans and start studying on their own, it may be some time until they have the next macro-counseling session. However, many learners mention how much they have done so far casually when they check out or return books, or when they use the SAC. Some say “I’m doing great.” Others just stop by and tell me ‘I will do my best’ and leave. The conversation is extremely short, but still it is likely to help them to have more confidence in what they are doing and in themselves. Again I realized the importance of such small talk and these interactions are examples of “micro-counseling”.

These examples show that micro-counseling could possibly encourage language learners to take the first step. It may give them opportunities to talk to TAs, talk to other learners, and to talk about themselves with counselors. Through such short interactions, we might be able to build rapport. Micro-counseling may help break barriers and eliminate obstacles that learners have. As a result, learners could build up readiness to start talking to counselors and start studying autonomously.

Conclusion

As many studies show (Mozzon-McPherson, 2001; Reinders, 2006), language counseling at SACs is likely to support language learners to become autonomous. It is very important to think of what we really do during counseling sessions. However, it

is also important to take a close look at what we do before, after, and in-between counseling sessions. What we say and how we behave could possibly influence the decision language learners make, and whether or not they want to participate in counseling sessions.

In the present study I used autoethnography as the research method. I am fully aware of the critiques toward autoethnography and have faced a dilemma about whether it was appropriate to call the present study an autoethnography. I would also like to acknowledge that the learners' decisions for engaging in macro-counseling sessions did not only result from micro-counseling encounters. Language learners simultaneously receive encouragement from multiple sources. In addition, it is possible that there were language learners who did not benefit from micro-counseling encounters and decided not to take part in macro-counseling sessions. However, I still believe autoethnography can be one approach for counselors to share what occurs before, after, in-between, and during counseling sessions, not only because I was able to reflect on my role as the counselor through the present study, but a large number of counseling sessions are offered it would be beneficial for the field if more stories were shared. Since more research on language counseling is expected, an autoethnographic approach could be one way for counselors to contribute the field of language counseling.

Finally, if we (counselors) were more aware of the existence of micro-counseling, we may be more likely to consciously conduct micro-counseling. This in turn could help language learners take the first step to becoming autonomous learners and may also motivate them when they struggle with continuing self-study.

Notes on the contributor

Satomi Shibata is the director of Foreign Language Study Support Center, Tokoha Gakuen University. She is also a lecturer there. She has been involved with self-access centers for over seven years.

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JASAL Forum 2011: Growing Trends in Self-Access Learning

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JASAL (the Japanese Association of Self Access Learning) was set up in 2005 by Garold Murray and Lucy Cooker to provide a support network for educators and administrators involved in the growing field of self-access learning in Japan. It hosts a website with information related to self-access learning in Japan, a discussion listserve and holds an annual forum at the JALT national conference. To find out more or to join JASAL (it's free!) please visit the JASAL website, <http://jasalorg.wordpress.com/join-us/>.

The following is a report by member Azusa Kodate of the 2011 JASAL Forum held at JALT2011 in Tokyo on November 19th, 2011.

The annual JASAL forum was held in Tokyo in 2011 in keeping with the theme of the JALT 2011 conference, 'Teaching, Learning, and Growing'.

Drawing on the theme of this year's JASAL forum, 'Growing Trends in Self-Access Learning', several different trends emerged from the two paper and five poster presentations that illustrate the ongoing growth of the field. Contents of the presentations varied widely from an administrative operation of a self-access centre (hereafter SAC) to research findings about SAC users. Having approximately 45 people including presenters at the forum, active discussions in which they shared ideas and professional practices were generated. One of the common points which emerged in the forum was that the form of learning that SACs provide is becoming more accepted and valued by educational institutions, and this has led to an increase in the number of SACs nationwide in Japan. Against this background, three themes were evident in the presentations given at this year's forum: focusing on the physical learning environment, providing easier access to learners, and supporting learning processes.

Focusing on the Physical Learning Environment

Physical environment, such as furniture layout and materials displays, can have a great impact on learner motivation in independent learning settings (Gardner &

Miller, 1999). As educators who support learners in such environments, we carefully need to observe interactions taking place between learners and their environment to provide comfortable and motivating learning opportunities. An important part of this physical learning environment is the service provided by SAC staff.

Noticing learners' behavioural and interaction patterns in a SAC

Satomi Shibata from Tokoha Gakuen University talked about the importance of creating spaces that can foster learners' independent learning. Having experience of establishing a SAC at both Nagoya Gakuin University and Tokoha Gakuen University, Shibata noticed some patterns in how learners use the centres and in their behaviour in the centres. She conducted an ethnographic study to investigate the correlation between environmental factors and learners' behavioural patterns. The data collected from her field notes and interviews highlighted some tendencies in learners' decision-making processes about choosing where to sit and study in the SAC at Tokoha Gakuen University. According to the data, learners sat relatively close to the desk where SAC staff were based when they felt they may need support from teachers or wished to focus on their learning. On the other hand, they sat away from the staff desk when they did not feel like pushing themselves very hard in their studies. Shibata's research findings also showed that learners selected chairs and desks based on their learning objectives on any given day, even though the majority of them did not consciously do so. They tended to choose round-shaped desks when they wanted to relax and square-shaped desks when they wanted to focus on studying. Based on her findings, Shibata emphasized that, as educators, we need to pay close attention to our learners' behavioural patterns to make our centres more usable and accessible, as well as to enable learners to make necessary decisions in their learning processes. Shibata also suggested changing the layout of the SAC on a regular basis to provide various learning environments to meet a wider range of learners' learning needs and styles.

Noticing and solving issues in administrative service at a SAC using the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle

SAC Director Caleb Foale, and Momoko Iida, an administrative assistant from Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University, presented their perspectives on how we can support learners' independent learning by providing high levels of service to learners.

Foale and Iida pointed out that whereas it is important for the SAC to be able to provide quality educational service, it is also important to provide satisfactory administrative service to promote the SAC among language learners.

Fourteen student staff members work part-time at their SAC and they are an essential asset to the centre because they act as role models as English language learners. Their presence also helps student users to lower their psychological barriers to entering and using the SAC, and they help the centre's continuous improvement by contributing ideas from a user's perspective. However, the centre also faces the challenge of raising the quality of customer service and other work carried out by the student staff to a satisfactory level. Foale and Iida explained how they use the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle, also known as the Deming Wheel (Moen & Norman, 2006) in their SAC student staff training process as part of service quality control. Foale and Iida gave a few concrete examples of the application of the cycle in their staff training, and explained how their student staff benefited from thinking about how they could overcome problems, executing plans to actually improve their work and generating their own solutions to work problems. By utilizing the cycle in their training system, Foale and Iida suggested that the overall quality of the service provided by the student staff had improved and they had started behaving more independently to look for ways to improve the learning environment in the SAC and make it a better place for learning. They described their student staff as great role models, not merely as language learners, but also as independent learners.

In summary, in those two presentations, the importance of proactiveness in constant improvement of learning environment in SACs was emphasised. Also, these presentations illustrated such approaches taken from various stakeholders' perspectives.

Providing Easier Access for Learners

Simply providing a positive environment is often not sufficient to support learners in an independent learning setting. It is also necessary to provide means of easy access for learners. This point was also shared and discussed at last year's forum under the theme of how educators can ease the psychological barriers that learners have in order to increase the numbers of student users (Foale, 2011). At this year's forum, Clair Taylor, Keiko Omura, and Gerald Talandis Jr. from Toyo Gakuen University, Scott Crowe from Sojo University, Caleb Foale from Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University, and Daniel Sasaki, Kelly Kimura, and Yukiko Ishikawa from Soka University presented on how they improved the accessibility of their SACs.

A stamp card system

Clair Taylor, Keiko Omura, and Gerald Talandis Jr. of Toyo Gakuen University gave a presentation on the action research project they had carried out to investigate how to promote independent learning in the freshman English course at their university. Specifically, they looked at whether a stamp card system that they initiated helped learners become familiar with the facilities, materials, and systems that the university provides, and whether this prompted students to actually start using them. In this system, students were eligible to receive a stamp every time they used a conversation lounge for communication practice, participated in events held in the lounge, had a learning advisory session with a teacher, borrowed learning materials, or accessed in-house online learning resources. After piloting the system with 26 students from one class, it was implemented (with the co-operation of classroom teachers) on a much larger scale with over 600 students involved. The data collected comprised of the stamp cards used by students, online learning records, teachers' reflective comments, and a survey of students. At the onset of the project, the system was set up in two different ways: mandatory and voluntary. Results indicated that the mandatory system encouraged students' independent learning activities much more than the voluntary system, according to the number of students who completed the activities on the card. They also found that the rate of activity completion increased when classroom teachers encouraged or reminded students to use the card system. Taylor, Omura, and Talandis Jr. also noted that when individual classroom teachers started making modifications and improvements to the card system later in the

research cycle (e.g., by colouring the cards, giving students prizes on completion of the card, and bringing students to the facilities), there was a positive influence on students' use of the facilities. Moreover, they reported that the number of students who completed all the activities on the card increased from 4% (2010) to 56% (2011) after the stamp card system was made a credit-bearing component of the freshman English programme. Accordingly, they concluded that having students' participation mandatory, giving hands-on induction and collaborating with classroom teachers were keys to promoting independent learning opportunities.

The SALC (Self-Access Learning Centre) Activities

At the SACs at Sojo University and Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University, attempts to integrate activities into the curriculum have also been made to encourage students to learn independently and to make use of the SACs. SAC Directors Scott Crowe and Caleb Foale spelled out the challenges they have been facing in trying to increase the number of student users given that their students are generally not familiar with independent learning, and the fact that neither university has a strong tradition of language learning. They emphasised that it is crucial for a SAC to be flexible and have the capacity to adapt to a target learner group. A series of activities were developed in each institution as a bridge between independent learning, which happens outside class, and learning which happens within class. These activities are voluntary at Sojo University, and compulsory at Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University. Through these activities, learners are introduced to tasks designed in such a way as to equip them with skills to choose appropriate learning resources, analyse their learning needs, build their awareness of their language levels and tendencies in learning, as well as to enable them to take greater responsibility in their learning. This is done in part by providing step-by-step instructions for language activities and graded reflective activities. Crowe and Foale explained that one of the features of these activities is to provide an opportunity for learners to enjoy using English so that they can overcome their negative feelings attached to English language learning at an early stage of their university studies. Another feature of the activities is an emphasis on developing skills for reflection and evaluation that enable learners to monitor and look back on their learning processes critically. This is largely done through reflective questions at the end of each activity. Foale referred to the value of using L1

for such reflective activities to let learners process their thoughts at a much deeper level.

Incorporating activities that learners can enjoy and linking contents with the curriculum to support their learning in the SACs have resulted in an increase in the number of students using the centres at both institutions.

Crowe and Foale concluded their presentation by discussing the degree to which independent learning should be completely voluntary. They emphasised their firm belief that it is one of the advisors' responsibilities to try to reach out to learners, with the necessary appropriate guidance, to enable them to make choices about whether they want or need to learn independently. Furthermore, they have suggested this step-by-step process of learner reflection as a rationale for the provision of progressive learning activities in their centres.

A scavenger hunt activity

Daniel Sasaki, Kelly Kimura, and Yukiko Ishikawa from Soka University also addressed the difficulty of encouraging student use of SACs. At Soka University, an English Consultation Room, AV Library, Chit Chat Club, CALL, and World Language Centre Lounge are all made available for students in different locations on campus. Sasaki, Kimura, and Ishikawa raised four possible barriers that prevent students from using these facilities: a psychological barrier to entering the centres; information provided by the centres not getting through to students and classroom teachers; a lack of understanding about the centres by both students and teachers; and consequently, teachers not being able or willing to recommend and send their students to the centres. Based on these assumptions, their goals were to improve stakeholders' interests and motivation to use the centres, improve the quality and quantity of information they provided, understand users' needs and stakeholders' demands, and provide users with more opportunities to be exposed to English language as well as independent learning environments. In order to address these issues, a scavenger game was developed as an orientation activity and was implemented as homework in English classes with the co-operation of classroom teachers. In this activity, students were asked to answer questions by physically visiting and looking around the centres. The underlying purpose here was to remove students' psychological barriers to the centres and to help them understand the benefits they could derive from using the facilities and services in the early stages of their campus lives. Classroom teachers

were also involved in the process of running the activities so they could develop their own understanding of the centres. As a result of these actions, they managed to help teachers to see the benefits of recommending the centres to their students. Sasaki, Kimura, and Ishikawa reported that by adopting this kind of promotional activity for the centres, they received positive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, centre managers, and librarians. They also reported that the number of centre users has been increasing since these changes were made.

In summation, there are differences in the systems each SAC developed to provide learners with easier access. One of the common features of such attempts was collaboration with classroom teachers and the curriculum. Developing ways to contribute to the curriculum, and the establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship between SACs and stakeholders would be one of the keys for the success of SACs.

Supporting Learning Processes

While the presenters above make SAC more appealing and accessible in order to enable learners to conduct learning as independent learners, it is also necessary to support their actual learning processes. As Gardner and Miller (2005) suggested, ‘the provision of self-study language-learning materials (grammar, listening, etc.) which independent learners can use to satisfy their own needs and wants’, (p 19) and ‘the preparation of learners for greater independence in their learning by encouraging the development of individual strategies, reflection on learning and taking responsibility’ (p. 19) are one of our central roles as educators in this field. In the forum, Kato and Sugawara, and Kodate addressed these points by talking about tools that can be used to support and scaffold learners’ acquisition of skills useful for conducting successful independent learning.

The English Language Learning Planner (Kato & Sugawara, forthcoming 2012) Supporting learners’ independent learning as learning advisors at Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages, Satoko Kato and Hisako Sugawara emphasised that simply focusing on the linguistic aspects of learning is not enough to promote independence in language learning. Rather, it is essential to equip learners with skills to manage and control their own learning processes (Benson, 2011).

Based on this idea, Kato and Sugawara have developed an English language learning planner. Although the planner looks at first glance like an ordinary diary, it was deliberately designed this way to allow individuals to accommodate English learning in their daily lives. By using the planner, learners are able to engage in training in some of the core skills for independent learning: setting learning goals, executing learning plans, and controlling their own motivation levels. From their perspective as experienced learning advisors, Kato and Sugawara developed such a tool to support learners who do not know where to start to improve their English as well as those who cannot see progress in their learning. They also reported on the creation of an online community, in which learners can share their learning experiences to help them keep motivated and for them to learn from each other. These aspects are incorporated into the planner to emphasize that interdependence is an element of successful independent learning.

A checklist of metacognitive learning strategies

Azusa Kodate, a learning advisor at Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University, also emphasized the importance of developing the metacognitive dimension in language learning. While the learning tool developed by Kato and Sugawara targeted learners more broadly, Kodate introduced teaching materials that she had developed for first-year undergraduate learners who take her course on independent learning. In this programme, learners are introduced to the conceptual ideas and the benefits of independent learning, some of the core skills required to conduct independent learning (e.g., needs analysis, goal setting, materials selection, and evaluation), and strategies for English language learning. Having been introduced to the theoretical aspects, learners carry out their own independent English learning projects, thereby transforming the knowledge they acquired from the course into practice. Throughout this process, learners are strongly encouraged to work on the metacognitive dimensions of learning, which, according to Kodate's description based on O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) research findings, includes 'planning', 'monitoring', 'problem-solving', 'evaluation', and 'controlling emotion' skills.

To raise learners' awareness of the importance of reflecting on these skills, a checklist was embedded in a learning evaluation booklet, in which learners were asked to keep a record of their learning. This booklet gives them an opportunity to

evaluate the metacognitive dimension in their learning processes after every lesson. Kodate noted that learners seemed to exercise such skills more consciously and frequently by building the check-list into the Learning Evaluation Booklet. Because this was learners' first experience of using a check-list, and because their levels of independence as well as English ability change constantly, Kodate mentioned the need to introduce a tool, such as a checklist, with some caution to provide effective support for learners' independent learning.

What emerged from the presentations by Kato and Sugawara, and by Kodate was the importance of understanding and control over both cognitive and psychological processes as skills to conduct independent language learning. As Benson (1997; 2011) describes autonomy as technical abilities to execute learning, the psychological capacity to control motivation, and metacognitive skills to control content and learning processes, focusing both on the linguistic and metacognitive aspects would be a key to successful independent language learning.

Summary

In the JASAL forum, three main themes, "focusing on the physical learning environment", "providing easier access to learners", and "supporting learning processes" were identified and discussed. The presentations also brought the participant's attention to the reality that having approachable environments and providing access to them alone do not guarantee development of independent learning skills. It is, therefore, important that we work on all three aspects to promote independent learning successfully.

What also emerged from reflecting on the presentations and discussions is that now that SACs have become more established in educational institutions, it is time for us to assess to what extent we can incorporate our learners' viewpoints, needs, and levels to provide better and more supportive education. As institutions that offer voluntary learning spaces and resources, the ultimate decision about whether or not to use a SAC depends on individual learners. However, as educators, we also have the responsibility to create opportunities for learners to be introduced to such learning environments and resources and to provide them with the necessary training to maximize the educational benefit.

Notes on the contributor

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