Perspectives on the English Language Education of Hong Kong's New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum

May Lai-Yin Wong
University of Hong Kong

Bio Data:
Dr. May L-Y Wong is an honorary assistant professor in the school of humanities (linguistics) at the University of Hong Kong. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in corpus linguistics. Her research interests focus on using corpora to address Chinese and English grammar as it relates to theory, language description and second language acquisition. She also researches into English language teaching and learning in the secondary school context.

Abstract
The paper explores issues relating to the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English curriculum in view of professional perspectives from curriculum design and task-based principles. To underline the roles played by learners and teachers in curriculum development, this paper looks at curriculum from a social contextual perspective as defined by Graves (2006; 2008). The NSS curriculum was designed to provide greater flexibility for secondary schools to cater for learners' varied interests, needs and capabilities, with the first-ever incorporation of an elective part of both language arts and non-language arts modules (e.g. poems and songs, popular culture, social issues, etc.) for learning English both creatively and practically. This study attempts to assess the innovation by considering the availability of resources and teacher education programs, roles of teachers and learners, and assessment schemes. The government has made available a series of teacher training programs and a wide range of resource books and materials packages for use by teachers. The paper argues that learners have recently shown some sign of compliance with task-based teaching, and that small-class teaching could optimise the implementation of the innovative curriculum. The use of school-based assessment in place of public examination in gauging English proficiency is a welcome change.

Keywords: English language education; curriculum; task-based teaching and learning; Hong Kong senior secondary schools; language arts; small-class teaching

Setting the scene: Hong Kong context
Over ninety-five per cent of Hong Kong's population is Cantonese-speaking ethnic Chinese (Howlett, 1997, ch. 24). However, English has always held an important

position in Hong Kong. It is primarily used in government, the media, employment and education, and is generally seen as a key to economic advantage (Li, 1999). Given the superior status of the English language in the former British colony, it is unsurprising that issues relating to the use of English in education or government have always had serious repercussions for the local community. A recent government move to impose Chinese medium of instruction on the majority of Hong Kong's secondary schools, for example, was met with strong resistance from parents (Bolton, 2003, p. 96-97; Schneider, 2007, p.139). As Miller et al. (2007, p. 220) rightly observe, '[t]he linguistically homogeneous nature of the local population, and the continued but restricted uses enjoyed by English (in addition to its long history as the language of the colonial power) make for a complex situation when making decisions about language planning policy and school curricula guidelines'.

This paper focusses on the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English curriculum proposed by the Hong Kong government in response to the new academic structure: three-year junior secondary education, three-year senior secondary education, four-year university education. The paper aims to consider issues relating to the NSS English curriculum in view of professional perspectives from curriculum design and task-based principles. It is organised as follows. In sections 2 and 3, the definitions of curriculum and task-based teaching and learning – which are crucial to the understanding of the curriculum in question – are discussed. Section 4 describes major features with particular reference to the newly introduced elective part of the curriculum. The NSS English education system is then explored in greater detail in section 5 in terms of the availability of resources, teacher education programs, roles of teachers and learners and assessment in support of the curriculum. Section 6 concludes with a discussion of the challenges that might lie ahead for language teaching professionals. While the main audience for this paper will be practitioners in Hong Kong itself, hopefully many elsewhere will follow the thinking behind the innovations with great interest.

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to a set of processes which plan what is to be taught/learned, implementing it and evaluating it (Hall & Hewings, 2001, p. 1; Richards, 2001, p. 2). To underline the roles played by learners and teachers in curriculum development, this paper looks at curriculum from a social contextual perspective as defined by Graves (2006, 2008). Graves advances a different view of curriculum, 'one that retains the three core processes of curriculum – planning, implementing and evaluating – but renames the middle one ENACTING to reflect the agency of teachers and learners in the classroom' (2008, p. 152; original emphasis). This concept of curriculum can also be found in Snyder et al. (1992), who describe curriculum enactment as the pedagogic experiences jointly created by students and teachers in the classroom. In this view, enactment – the teaching and learning processes that happen in the classroom – is given more weight than planning and evaluating. Also in this view, the three processes that make up curriculum are always local in the sense that they are constrained in by specific social and educational contexts of a local community and are carried out by people within these contexts. I chose to adopt Greaves' (2008) view of curriculum as it lends itself well to the new English language curriculum proposed by the Hong Kong government for secondary schools, which emphasises language learning experiences through participation in a wide range of tasks for diverse communicative contexts, as will be outlined in section 4. It is therefore instructive to discuss the notion of task and task-based learning before considering the new syllabus.[1]

Task-based teaching and learning

In common with contemporary English language teaching (ELT) trends, task-based approaches to teaching continue to form a prominent component of the new senior secondary English language curriculum in Hong Kong. This task-based innovation was previously known as the target-oriented curriculum (TOC; Curriculum Development, 1999), which was later superseded by a reform called *Learning to learn*

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[1] In this paper, the term *syllabus* is used in its broad sense, referring to the whole process of how language is learned, selecting materials and preparing them for the classroom, and thus can be used interchangeably with *curriculum*. In the narrow sense (e.g. Nunan, 1988), a syllabus means a plan for what is to be learned in a course. The broader meaning of syllabus is more widely used in the literature and materials published in Britain and Australia (e.g. Willis, 1990; Feez, 1998), while in the USA the term curriculum is more commonly used (e.g. Brown, 1995).

(Curriculum Development Council, 2001). Although the term TOC is no longer used in the new syllabus, it characterises two primary features of task-based pedagogies: TOC is a form of outcome-based education in which students progress towards clearly defined learning objectives and targets by carrying out tasks (Clark et al., 1994; Carless, 1997; Morris, 2000). Based on constructionist learning principles, TOC encourages students to develop their own learning. Task-based teaching and learning espouse both features for studying English. In essence, task-based learning is process-oriented: during tasks, learners are engaged with an interactive meaning-making process with each other using whatever linguistic resources they can pool together. Thus, language proficiency is built up through their participation in communicative tasks.

Much of the research into task-based teaching discusses the notion of *task* differently (e.g. Breen, 1987a, 1987b; Candlin, 1987; Skehan, 1998, 2003; Bygate, 2000; Ellis, 2000, 2003; Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001). For example, Skehan (1998) outlines four key features of tasks as follows: meaning is central, students work towards a goal in tasks, students are assessed in accordance with task outcomes, and tasks are designed to reflect real-world situations. Rather than highlighting real-world contexts, Cameron (2001) defines tasks using language goals, process and product: they have coherence in topics covered, activity types, and/or outcomes, clear meaning and purpose, specified learning goals, and require learners' active involvement. Since the 1980s, communication as the basis for teaching and learning languages has begun gaining currency. Dubin & Olshtain (1986) advocate a curriculum based on communicative goals, and Yalden (1987) calls for more balanced curriculum on both form and communicative functions. Breen (1987a, 1987b) proposes a paradigm shift in syllabus design from packaging language as a subject-language to conceptualising language teaching and learning as negotiated classroom tasks. Since then, ability to communicate in English has become a primary objective of English language curriculum, particularly in East Asian countries such as Japan and Korea where English is taught/learned as a foreign language (Sato & Takahashi, 2003; Potts & Park, 2007). It is not hard to see that communicative competence is at the heart of all this

task-based orientation towards teaching.

Being able to communicate well in English has long been a priority on Hong Kong's education agenda. Over two decades ago, the Hong Kong government criticised the traditional practice of English language teaching as teacher-centred which concentrated on 'the formal features of the language at the expense of encouraging students to use the language' (Education Commission, 1994, p. 25), and in consequence, a communicative, purposeful type of approach has been adopted since the early 1980s (Curriculum Development Committee, 1981, 1983). However, it was not widely implemented in the classroom, and was considered largely unsuccessful because traditional textbooks, coursework and teacher training did not support communicative approaches (Evans, 1996, 1997; Carless, 1999):

> As is common with most innovations, the degree of actual implementation of TOC is quite variable. Some teachers and some schools have developed a good understanding of TOC and are implementing its spirit. Other schools have a less thorough understanding and are adopting the innovation in name, without there being any actual classroom evidence of the principles of TOC. (Carless, 1999, p. 242)

The task-based syllabus was seen as enhancing the communicative one. In task-centred English language learning, a task takes place in a real, simulated or imaginary context with underlying real-life justification for doing the task, and involves thinking and reasoning rather than simply displaying knowledge or practising skills. As will be discussed in section 5, in full support of this task-based syllabus, the Hong Kong government and educational academics issued resource books and materials packages for use by teachers in order to operationalise the syllabus effectively in secondary school contexts (see, for example, Mok, 2001; Education and Manpower Bureau, 2002; 2004). We turn now to a comprehensive description of the new curriculum in the following section, which outlines all essential features of this reform.

Hong Kong's English language education in the NSS curriculum
The New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum was designed to provide greater flexibility for Hong Kong schools to cater for individual learners' varied interests,

needs and capabilities (see section 5). The Education Bureau (previously known as Education and Manpower Bureau; a government body equivalent to the Ministry of Education in some other countries) announced in 2005 – in its report titled *The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong* – that this new three-year academic structure would come into effect in September 2009 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). The new curriculum is composed of nine Key Learning Areas (KLAs), of which English language education is the prime interest of this paper.[2]

The NSS framework was a product of concerted efforts by educational academics, seconded secondary head teachers, practising teaching professionals and officers from the Education Bureau. It is based on key recommendations made in recent curriculum changes documented in four government publications, namely, *Senior secondary curriculum guide* (Curriculum Development Council (CDC), 2007), *Basic education curriculum guide – building on strengths* (CDC, 2002), *Learning to learn – the way forward in curriculum development* (CDC, 2001), and *Learning for life, Learning through life* (Education Commission, 2000). Preparatory research was carried out both within the Hong Kong context and with respect to curriculum guidelines for senior secondary education in a number of other countries (e.g. Australia's ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, Scotland's National Qualifications, New South Wales' Board of Studies).

The English language education component of the NSS curriculum is based on a constructivist view of learning. Its main intentions are:

- the development of specific learning targets to provide a clear direction for learning;
- the use of learning tasks to promote 'learning by doing' and to involve students in 'three interrelated strands which define the general purposes of learning English' (CDC and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), 2007: 11): INTERPERSONAL STRAND (for interpersonal communication), KNOWLEDGE STRAND (for developing and applying knowledge), EXPERIENCE STRAND (for responding and giving expression to real and imaginative experience);

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[2] The nine KLAs are Chinese language education, English language education, mathematics education, personal, social and humanities education, science education, technology education, arts education, physical education and liberal studies.

- the need of catering for individual learner differences so as to adapt teaching and learning to different student abilities and learning styles;
- the promotion of learner independence and lifelong learning so that students can become more actively involved in constructing knowledge and skills in classroom activities and in their own time;
- the use of task-based learning as an integral part of teaching, learning and assessment;
- a greater emphasis on school-based assessment rather than one-off assessment based on public exams.
- the first-ever incorporation of an elective part (25%) of modules to allow for more flexibility for both schools and students to choose their desired topics (e.g. poems and songs, popular culture, sports communication, social issues) with which to learn English more creatively.

The elective part

The elective part of the NSS curriculum is primarily driven by a desire to motivate students to speak in English. Previous research has suggested that students who are motivated by a wish to be able to use English as a communication tool tend to have a greater preference for task-oriented learning activities (e.g. Richards, 1998). Thus the introduction of the elective part into the new curriculum should be considered as a deliberate move by the government to enhance task-based teaching. Essentially, the elective component proposed by the government consists of a wide array of tasks: as clearly set out in the suggested schemes of work (Education Bureau, 2007; see also section 5.1) for the elective part published by the government, students are expected to learn English through simulated situations such as drama and workplace communication which aim to engage their interest in learning English and putting what they have learned into practice. While the elective part accounts for only a quarter of the final mark, it may make the public examination less frightening and more predictable for students. It is used as a basis for accessing students' writing and oral skills. In the writing section, essay questions are devised with reference to the knowledge and skills taught/learned in the elective component. Part of students' English proficiency is also assessed (by their schools) on the basis of their performance in individual presentations and group interactions related to the elective module.

Furthermore, the elective section has the merit of being both informative and

enjoyable. It comprises eight modules broadly divided into *language arts* (drama, short stories, poems and songs, popular culture) and *non-language arts* (sports communication, debating, social issues, workplace communication). It aims to 'provide a balanced and flexible curriculum to cater for learners' diverse needs, interests and abilities' (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p. 15). While teaching materials inspired by poems and drama abound (see, for example, Mok, 2001), songs which are traditionally less recognised as a formal means of teaching English in secondary school contexts (Chan, 1997) have first been officially introduced into the English syllabus in Hong Kong. In fact, the idea of using songs in ELT context is not entirely new. Smith (2003) describes some attempts by undergraduate and postgraduate students to transcribe song lyrics on a voluntary 15-hour summer course *English through songs* run by the University of Hong Kong's English centre. The same course was also offered to serving secondary teachers via the university's extramural programme. Evaluation comments from the participants are mixed: while students were generally surprised by the idea that their English could be improved in an enjoyable and relaxing way, many teachers viewed songs and their lyrics as 'a kind of light relief' from the examination-oriented syllabus and thus could never be 'a serious tool for enhancing language acquisition without supplementary grammar exercises' (*ibid*, p. 115). However, Smith has forcefully demonstrated the benefits of using songs in the classroom. All examples of misinterpreted lyrics point to the fact that basic English phonology is not fully mastered by the advanced learners of English. Cantonese-speaking learners always have problems with word endings due to L1 transfer; Cantonese endings are highly constrained, which contain only vowels, nasals or single unreleased stops. The distinction between voiced and unvoiced consonants and some vowel phonemes which are not contrastive in the L1 are also problem areas. In addition, the tertiary students were reported to have difficulty in understanding lyrics which contain the idiomatic phrases such as 'left in the lurch' and 'stood him up'. Smith argues that if used appropriately, these transcription errors 'can be a useful diagnostic tool to point to areas of phonological weakness which require attention' (*ibid*.: 121). Those areas can then be tackled according to the specific needs of the

learners; for instance, specific listening exercises and production tasks can be used to improve on such problems.

The evidence reported on in Smith's (2003) study reinforces the pedagogic values of authentic materials which take a vast number of forms, including pop songs, television, radio, movies, gossip magazines, comics, fashion, computer games and the Internet (Lo, 1995; Cheung, 2001). Lo (1995, p. 55) states that 'teaching/learning materials are authentic only insofar as they trigger learners' personal experiences in their own society'. In other words, authentic language learning largely emanates from different forms of popular culture which most school-age learners find familiar and interesting. Cheung (2001) gives the following reasons for the use of popular culture in teaching. Firstly, students find it motivating and easy to follow since 'popular culture touches the lives of student and grows out of their natural experience and interests' (*ibid*.: 58). Secondly, using popular culture in the classroom adds novelty and variety to lessons. Thirdly, it bridges the gap between subject knowledge (i.e. what students have learned through formal schooling) and encountered knowledge (i.e. what students have learned through interactions with the world). Fourthly, the content of teaching activities and exercises provides students with some need to learn English. Though some foreign countries have already shown some success in integrating popular culture into English teaching (see, for example, Domoney & Harris, 1993; Williamson & Hardman, 1994), this is the first time the Hong Kong government has formally given it some place in its English curriculum.

Furthermore, as creativity is a 'generic skill' promoted in the new curriculum (CDC and HKEAA, 2007, p. 8), story writing has been included as a language arts module in the elective part. Some Hong Kong secondary schools have attempted to create an authentic situation where student writing is produced for a particular purpose or audience – in line with task-based principles. For example, Greenfield (2003) discusses how teenage secondary school students in Hong Kong exchange emails with their counterparts in the USA. A recent attempt at short story production in an elite local girls' school by Mak et al. (2007) is indeed a showcase example of implementing task-based learning for other schools in Hong Kong to consider and

perhaps follow. The project involved a class of 39 secondary students who produced as the final task outcome their own story books and later on read their stories to nearby primary school pupils. Teachers essentially took a non-interventionist approach to directing students' ideas and correcting students' actual stories; they did, however, point out unclear and incoherent storylines and correct minor grammar and spelling errors. This is clearly in contrast with traditional approaches to teaching and evaluating of writing in most Hong Kong ELT classrooms where teachers primarily attend to grammar rather than content and the intended audience tends to be the teacher only (Lee, 1998). In the evaluation, the researchers reported that 'the secondary school students' creativity is substantially enhanced by the activity, while their interest and attention during English lessons increased dramatically' (Mak et al., 2007, p. 9). In view of the success gained in this project, students are expected to learn English more creatively and effectively under the new curriculum guidelines.

While the language arts modules focus on creativity, the non-language arts modules emphasise practical use of English outside the classroom i.e. in debating, in discussing current affairs and social issues and in sports and workplace communication. Teaching materials for these modules – except for debating and workplace communication – appear to be readily available in the newspapers and as such should not pose much challenge to school teachers, who have been used to tapping into newspapers for classroom use (see Mok (1990) for an illustration of how newspapers can be used effectively in ELT context). Debating is not an entirely new item on the English curriculum, however. It resembles one way or another a small group discussion component of the public examination senior secondary school students need to take part in for accessing their speaking ability. Local English teachers generally equip their students with a set of formulaic expressions and interaction strategies (i.e. clarifying oneself, seek clarification, checking understanding of other people's messages, etc.) for use in discussion (see Lam & Wong (2000) for a description of these strategies). Compared with debating, workplace communication seems to be a relatively new topic to both teachers and students. Yet there have been a number of online teaching resources designed by

tertiary institutions that secondary school teachers might find useful and suitable to be tailored to the needs of their students. For instance, the Open University of Hong Kong has developed a World of Professional Communication portal for community access free-of-charge.[3] It offers a range of written samples commonly used in the workplace (letters, memos, emails, notices, reports, agendas, minutes, resumes, etc.) as well as sound advice on communication skills in interviewing, meeting, negotiating presenting, socialising and telephoning. Recently, the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong has launched a series of resource books on the same theme 'Professional Related Language Training' for effective workplace communication in a number of disciplines such as business, logistics, design, hotel and tourism.[4]

Discussion

Obviously, Hong Kong's new English curriculum for senior secondary schools adopts a process-oriented, communicative or task-based approach, particularly in the elective part. This is explicitly stated in the *English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 – 6)* (CDC and HKEAA, 2007)

> It is clearly necessary to go beyond merely teaching grammar and vocabulary (a practice widely adopted in the past, but no longer considered adequate by itself) by providing them with ample opportunities to apply the language they have been taught to express ideas and feelings appropriately in different communicative settings, and through this to strengthen and extend their language knowledge and skills. (*ibid*., p. 67)

Ever since the target-oriented curriculum (TOC) initiative started to be implemented in 1993, task-based pedagogies were heavily debated in Hong Kong (Morris et al., 1996; Carless, 1999). In fact, the mismatch between curriculum innovations and classroom practices has been well documented in the educational literature (e.g. Fullan, 1991, 1999; Markee, 1997). More specifically, the challenges of implementing learner-centred, process-oriented approaches in Asian contexts have also been discussed in the literature, for example, Hui (1997) with respect to China,

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[3] http://learn.ouhk.edu.hk/~wpc/
[4] http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/PRLT/

Cheah (1998) with reference to Singapore, and Li (1998) discusses teachers' perceptions of a communicative teaching approach in South Korea. With respect to the Hong Kong context, Carless (1999, p. 240) notes that 'issues such as lack of resources, insufficient long-term teacher training, entrenched teacher attitudes, lack of ownership of change have been seen to impact negatively on the prospects for change'. Although these four problematic issues seem to have plagued the TOC development – the predecessor of the NSS curriculum, the government has made perceptible efforts to improve on the feasibility and acceptability of the task-based innovations in the new syllabus.

Resources

To ensure wide circularity and easy access by the teachers, the Education Bureau has resourced the NSS innovation with appropriate teaching materials all available on the web, notably *Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part of the Three-year Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum (Secondary 4 – 6)* (Education Bureau, 2007).[5] The schemes detail how an effective task-based lesson can be run, specifying a teaching focus, suggesting time allocation (number of lessons required), describing target knowledge skills to be learned, and most importantly, devising tasks to involve students actively in the learning process. Other learning and teaching resources in support of the schemes are also available online (hosted on the same web site along with the schemes), including handouts, presentation or group discussion feedback forms, examples of projects or sub-tasks, and video clips on using documentaries (e.g. Chinese white dolphins) in language teaching. Additionally, Appendix 4 of the new English language curriculum guide (CDC & HKAEE, 2007, p. 152-157) outlines a range of community resources to support lifelong learning, for instance, the English Speaking Union Hong Kong (organising a volunteer program for practicing conversational English in a relaxed, social atmosphere), and Toastmasters, Hong Kong (holding a young leadership program for teaching public speaking to secondary students and improving their communication and leadership skills). There

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[5] http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeID=2773

are plenty of resources available for use by teachers.

Teacher education programs

General teacher education efforts which extend the capabilities of the teaching workforce hold the key to the success of curriculum change (Carless 1999, p. 251). However, a major problem about task-based teaching in Hong Kong is that teachers generally do not have a clear understanding of the nature of tasks and the theoretical and practical aspects of carrying out tasks (Morris et al., 1996). While Carless (1999) also cites lack of teacher training as a factor hindering the development of task-based teaching, in an earlier paper (Carless, 1998), he points out that both his case study evidence and considerable anecdotal evidence point to similar trends in which younger teachers who are themselves trained in communicative or task-based approaches seem more receptive to applying them in their own teaching. In order to raise awareness of the NSS English language policy, the Education Bureau runs for a span of one year (Sept 2007 – Aug 2008) three sets of NSS series of seminars and workshops targeted at English panel chairpersons and teachers for (i) understanding and interpreting the curriculum; (ii) assessing student learning; (iii) learning and teaching of the elective part of the curriculum.

The roles of teachers and learners

As with TOC (see section 3), the new English curriculum requires a change in the roles of teachers and learners. The desire for such a change is even stronger with the NSS curriculum than ever before, with the introduction of the elective part which is designated as task-based. Ideally, teachers are no longer mere transmitters of knowledge but facilitators of independent learning; learners are no longer passive recipients of information but active participants in the process of constructing knowledge and skills. Existing educational norms in Hong Kong are at odds with these roles required by the learner-centred, communicative teaching approach (Carless, 1999; Lee, 2004). Over the past two decades, teachers dominated talk in the classroom (Tsui, 1985, 1996), while secondary school students seldom seek clarification or pose questions and respond to teacher questions minimally (Wu,

1993).

Carless (1999) accounts for these norms in the educational system by using Biggs' (1996) Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). CHC posit that teachers are a role model of learning and a source of authority and thus should be respected by their students. Under the influence of CHC, posing (challenging) questions to a teacher would generally be regarded as undermining the authority of the teacher and, therefore, inappropriate. As Carless (*ibid.*, p. 251) correctly observes, 'students in CHC cultures are socialised to accept didactic whole-class teaching, which is generally not the case with Western students'. With respect to ELT, there are at least two problems with these cultural norms. Littlewood (1999, p. 71) states that teachers who have internalised stereotypical notions of learners might be less sensitive to the needs of individual students. The prevailing cultural norms also create tensions with the facilitative teacher roles required in task-based learning (Carless, 2004, p. 643).

Given these 'cultural barriers', the implementation of the NSS English language curriculum seems doubly daunting. However, some scholars view the Chinese cultural characteristics differently and capitalise on the Chinese emphasis on social relationships and collectivism. For example, Tang (1996) advocates cooperative learning in which students work together in problem-solving tasks, whereas Winter (1996) suggests that peer tutoring may be well-suited to the Hong Kong context. In addition, CHC students are not as passive and unwilling to contribute in class as have been stereotyped. Lin and Luk (2002), for instance, report that students are more engaged in communicative tasks by making explicit to them the rationale and learning objectives behind the tasks they are told to do. Similarly, Mok et al. (2006) describe the success of a pilot, literature-based curriculum in motivating students to work in groups and practise their English. In one task, students were asked to rewrite the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde into a drama script. By participating in dramatised reading, students gradually gained confidence in their speaking, listening and communication skills, and created 'a sense of shared ownership' of their learning (*ibid.*: 71). Not only have learners' attitudes shown some sign of compliance with the innovative learner-centred, process-oriented, task-based teaching, teachers may also be

undergoing a gradual shift away from the traditional authoritative persona as described above. Tsui (2005) analysed the type of questions posed by primary school teachers in curriculum planning and found that the questions changed from those that revolve around a syllabus-driven, teacher-fronted, textbook-based approach (e.g. 'What linguistic items do we want to teach?) to the ones with a greater emphasis on enhancing student motivation and participation in learning (e.g. 'What opportunities are afforded for learners to participate in meaning making?).

Furthermore, for teachers practising communicative, process-oriented or task-based approaches in CHC context, handling noise or indiscipline remains a central issue. Pair or group activities are crucial to these approaches. However, for some teachers, to allow students to work in pairs or groups is to lose control of classroom management. Based on extended classroom observation, Tsui (2003) illustrates the importance of discipline to language teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools. A possible solution lies in small-class teaching (SCT). Small classes appear to be an optimum prerequisite for task-based approaches to learning a subject. Keats and Boughey (1994) describe the success of task-orientated cooperative group work in a second-year botany course in stimulating students' interest in the subject and improving their use of higher intellectual processes. In ELT classrooms in South Korea, Jeon and Hahn (2006) report that 70.1% of middle school and high school teachers surveyed agree that task-based language teaching is appropriate for small group work rather than whole-class teaching. In my view, the greatest attraction offered by SCT would be teachers' ease of monitoring learner performance during tasks: they can ensure that target language rather than mother tongue is produced and learning goals are met. In Hong Kong, the small-class drive is presently hotly contested in the mass media because it is due to be implemented in state primary schools from September 2009 onwards, with an increasing number of schools starting the new class size (25 pupils per class) in each successive year. By the 2014/15 school year, all classes from all primary levels (primary one to six) will be implementing SCT. In its latest (February) report, the Education Bureau (2008) has suggested that over two-thirds of 463 public sector primary schools have confirmed their readiness

for SCT, and parents generally welcome the move. If SCT is proved to be successful, hopefully it will soon be extended to the secondary school context to optimise the use of task-based teaching and learning.

Assessment

As noted in section 2, curriculum development involves three core processes: planning, implementing/enacting and evaluating. In his seminal work, Johnson (1989) regards these three processes as a coherent whole, which should be undertaken consistently to reach a specific curricular goal. The new English syllabus for senior secondary schools aims at developing learners' communicative competence (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p. 73). To this end, task-based approaches to language learning are adopted to help students learn how to communicate in the target language through purposeful interaction. As we have seen, these communicative approaches are incorporated into the curriculum design and resourced with a range of teaching materials and teacher training programs. In other words, both planning and implementation decisions are well informed by the communicative, learner-centred orientation towards English language learning and teaching. As will be outlined below, assessment and evaluation – the final phase of curriculum development – are also carried out in a systematic and consistent way so as to contribute to a successful innovation.

However, the expectations of parents and students (and everyone else) that senior secondary schooling will prepare students for university entrance exams will still exert a strong influence on the language curriculum. In countries practising CHC such as China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore, proficiency in English and success in public examinations correlate with advanced socioeconomic status and future financial rewards (Carless, 1999, p. 250). Competition through tests and examinations is indeed a normal part of schooling in Hong Kong and a means of preparing students for tougher competition in the society (Cheng & Wong, 1996). Given the importance of public exam results, the major curricular goal of communicative competence in ELT becomes secondary. As Sato and Takahashi (2003) observe, in Japan, although

the goal of the Ministry of Education for high school graduates is to be able to conduct basic communication on topics related to daily life, what matters is not how well the student is able to communicate but how well s/he is able to pass the public exam. The same holds true in Korea (Potts & Park, 2007). While the influence that the examination system exerts in the Hong Kong context appears to be unavoidable, there is at least some good sign that the government is now giving formal recognition to communicative competency in its new task-based language curriculum, which accounts for a total of 20% of the high-stakes Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) university entrance exam. The promising change is that while reading (20% of the total subject mark), writing (30%), listening and integrated skills (30%) are still accessed by means of a public examination, oral skills (20%) are entirely gauged by school-based assessment (SBA). SBA refers to assessments administrated in school contexts so that learners' English proficiency is judged more reliably by their own subject teachers within an extended space of time rather than a one-off examination, 'since a public speaking examination may not always provide the most reliable indication of the actual speaking abilities of candidates' (CDC and HKEAA, 2007, p. 119). This new assessment for language proficiency will certainly act as a springboard for further task-based language practices as didactic teaching methods with notes and model answers will cease to be a superior model for achieving exam success.

Conclusions

This study has offered a comprehensive account of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English syllabus to be implemented in Hong Kong in September 2009. It has also assessed the innovation by considering the availability of resources and teacher education programs, roles of teachers and learners, and assessment schemes. These issues might be of benefit to actual teaching practice in Hong Kong and other Asian countries. For instance, any innovation must be properly resourced with accessible teaching materials and suggested schemes of work published by the authority. Teachers should have a clear understanding of the objectives of the innovation

through a series of seminars and workshops. Both teachers and learners should be aware of their roles in the new curriculum. The goals of the new initiative can be fulfilled with the help of an assessment scheme which enhances the application of the innovative curriculum in the classroom. These issues are very important steps towards the successful reform of a curriculum.

In addition, the success of a new curriculum depends critically on top-down and bottom-up processes (see, for example, Markee, 1997; Stoller, 2002; Wu, 2002; Rice, 2007). Top-down support from higher administration is essential in curriculum innovation; in the case of Hong Kong, the government is clearly committed to change to a task-based English teaching approach. However, a new curriculum needs to undergo a process of mediation in which bottom-up participation of teachers and students comes into play. As Rice (2007, p. 6) insightfully points out, '[t]he most important factor researchers point out is that lasting innovation cannot be imposed by a higher authority. Bottom-up participation in the change process of all stakeholders, especially faculty and students, is of vital importance'. The new curriculum needs to be adapted to or modified by the realities of the local classroom. According to Carless (1999, p. 251), '[t]his can become a more bottom-up version of curriculum development or one in which a general direction is outlined from above, but classroom implementation is controlled by the teachers'. Both top-down and bottom-up processes can be demonstrated with reference to the elective part of Hong Kong's NSS English language curriculum. A generally laissez faire implementation policy is in place to afford schools the freedom to offer those elective modules which they feel most comfortable with and to underplay those modules that they feel are less compatible with the prevailing school culture. Further, the elective component can be offered to students as early as the first year of their senior secondary education at the discretion of the school. The flexibility in terms of which and when elective modules are delivered may also have a positive impact at the organisation level of schools. The new curriculum prompts greater cooperation and discussion between teachers and possibly between teachers and learners and through this collaboration, teachers' professional development and learners' motivation may be enhanced.

The challenges of framing language teaching and learning in a curriculum can be summerised as follows:

> This [curriculum planning] is not a simple or a clean task because it requires synthesising the massive amounts of information gathered through needs assessments, meetings with program administrators and colleagues, review of policy documents and other activities. At the same time, in identifying the organisational structure of the course, course developers have to take into account logistical constraints, the expectations of the educational system in which the course will be offered, explicit and implicit teaching policies, the course developers' own beliefs about teaching and learning, and their degree of professional experience (Snow & Kamhi-Stein, 2006, p. 9).

What is not, however, mentioned in this paragraph about challenges in curriculum development is the need for teacher educators to work collaboratively with teachers to introduce innovation into the curriculum. Recently, there have been some good examples of teacher education and teacher collaboration for curriculum change in Hong Kong (Tsui, 2005; Mok et al., 2006). Equally importantly, the challenge for innovations in language curriculum to take root is to focus more on how to acknowledge and build on existing norms to bring about change rather than uproot and supplant them (Kramsch, 1993; Holliday, 1994; Hall, 1998; Li, 2001; Tsui, 2005). Given the implementation of the target-oriented curriculum (TOC) as a trial run in previous years to prepare students, teachers, curriculum and materials developers, teacher educators and program administrators for a learner-centred, communicative syllabus, the time is ripe for the new English language curriculum to take effect. While TOC has enabled at least some change to take place, the NSS English language policy guarantees real change to be felt in the education sector and the society at large.

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Young Language Learner Assessment:

A Case for Using Assessment Portfolios

Gerry Lassche
Miyagi Gakuin Women's University, Japan

Bio Data:
Mr. Gerry Lassche holds an MA (TESOL), and holds a Certificate for Teaching English to Children from David English House. He has given Korean MOE sponsored seminars for elementary school teachers on assessment, materials design and teaching reading, and taught intensive "speaking upgrade" seminars, and was an invited consultant on the English Village project (Paju, Korea), which targeted upper elementary school students. He has lectured on behalf of the Ajou University Graduate School of Education (Suwon, Korea) on Teaching English through English and Teaching Young Learners, and has delivered core courses on TESOL Methodology and TESOL Practicum on the Ajou-Wisconsin TESOL Certificate Program.

Abstract
The introduction of English into the Japanese elementary school presents an important curriculum issue of suitability and accountability: how to ensure that teaching and learning is enjoyable, easy to understand, trustworthy, and can improve practices. The crucial consideration is that children differ in their rates of development and in their approaches to learning in many ways.   This paper, a description of important young learner (YL) differences, will provide a rationale for the use of assessment portfolios to answer that issue. Various examples of portfolio content will be provided which demonstrate individual tailoring of testing and feedback over the entire course of learning, in a way that shows progress through observed skill development for all stakeholders.

Introduction
Elementary education in Japan will soon include the teaching of English to children from grade 5 and up. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is tasked with realizing this vision for implementation in 2009 – 2010. While the administrative details have yet to be clearly specified, the broad goals of such a program were already laid out in a white paper published in 2003 on the MEXT website, called "Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to

Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities."

It would appear that the government has provided ambiguous information on why it is proposing an early start to English teaching (Japan Politics and Policy, 2001). However, by carefully sifting through policy reports and media releases, Goto-Butler (2007) has offered a detailed and comprehensive rationale, and while it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the specific complex of details, a summary is possible. The government was interested in internationalizing the curriculum (known as kokusaika), in an effort to make it more fully compete in the international business world. Eventually this process began to place more emphasis on the development of more communicative English skills, with sooner being thought better. The process culminated in a series of policy white papers from a panel of experts commissioned directly through the Prime Minister's office, culminating in the plan mentioned above. With specific regard to elementary school education, MEXT (2003a) states:

> It is important that experiential learning activities that are **suitable** for elementary school students are carried out, and that the **motivation and attitude** for children to **communicate positively** is fostered by providing children with exposure to foreign language conversation in an **enjoyable** manner, and by familiarizing them with foreign cultures and ways of living…The situation and content of English conversation activities at elementary schools will be **surveyed and publicized** through the **Status Report on Improvements in English Education (SRIEE)** mentioned previously. This will contribute to further approaches for **improvement**. (MEXT, 2003a; bold added)

Top priorities for educational reform then, as described by MEXT (2003b) include four main components: easy to understand classes; enjoyable classes that are free of worries; a process that is trusted by parents and communities; and finally, a system that can improve the provision for education. From the above, a summary of crucial points include:

1. the provision of developmentally-appropriate education (suitable, enjoyable, easy to understand)

2. accountability to stakeholders (SRIEE, parents, teachers, students)

3. feedback system for gauging curriculum development (improvement)

What this means, therefore, is that there must be instruments for assessing the quality of teaching, and its impact on learning. This assessment, as part of the learning environment, should also be characterized as stress-free ("free of worries"), enjoyable, associative, easy, and one that aims at improvements in performance, as well as engaging stakeholders in such a way as to inspire trust and confidence in what is taking place in local elementary classrooms.

Maley lamented that "when it comes to assessing the progress of young language learners, we often find ourselves driven back on testing materials which are more appropriate for use with older learners" (Ioannou-Georgio and Pavlou, 2003, iii). This is a concern that has been echoed in other countries, and MEXT is well-aware of the dangers of age-inappropriate assessment: "the simple introduction of junior high school English education at an earlier stage as well as teacher-centered methods for cramming knowledge should be avoided." (MEXT, 2003a)

MEXT states that "teaching methods relating to English education at elementary schools will continue to be developed." It is hoped that the reinvention of the education wheel will not be carried, that a review of current international best practice elsewhere for elementary education will suffice. In this paper, then, I will review the characteristics that differentiate elementary school learners from older, high school-level learners. From there, an enunciation of a set of educational guidelines that specify clearly how assessment should be carried out will follow. An assessment procedure that best exemplifies and fulfills the priorities and characteristics that MEXT has in principle already agreed to will be described and discussed to spotlight the use of assessment portfolios. With the help of this, I will launch into a description of portfolio contents, with pertinent examples drawn from the existing literature, and evaluate each example in terms of its age-appropriacy as well as its applicability to the local EFL setting.

Review of Relevant Developmental Literature

McKay (2006) suggests that young learners differ from older learners in 3 broad areas, and these will be discussed in relation to testing:

1. growth factors (which includes cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical issues)

2. literacy factors

3. vulnerability issues.

Growth factors

First, *growth factors* are especially important, because children are developing, day by day. Children differ greatly in their individual rates of development, as well as their general development at particular ages within particular skill areas. For example, one child might be socially very competent, and yet demonstrate more linguistic errors than another child, as can be the case in a bilingual home (Riordan, 2005). A test that focused only on a child's linguistic development and not social development might cause undue alarm for a teacher or parents.

Cognitive issues at young ages include shorter attention spans, understanding the connection between a cause and its effect, understanding how parts can relate to a whole, organizing information in their minds for short-term and long-term memory recall. With a shorter attention span, a testing environment which required a child to pay close attention for more than 15 or 20 minutes would elicit boredom or fatigue. Following detailed instructions to perform some test task, rather than through play or experimentation, would also prove difficult for most children. Because children might not understand the importance of the rubric, or perhaps that the rubric failed to engage *them*, short-term recall would probably suffer. Children tend to learn best through direct experience, where they can see and relate an object within its environment. Hypothesizing about some situation, imagining possible effects, requires an ability to abstract that is developmentally unavailable at younger ages. This becomes almost impossible when the imagined object is beyond the child's range of experience (ie. answering questions on a story involving playing outside in winter, when the child has never seen snow). Using a meta-language (ie grammatical terms) to identify parts of a sentence, (a test item often employed for vocabulary or grammar tests in middle school), would not be appropriate for young language learners (YLLs).

Socio-emotional issues arise due to the fact that the child is still learning how cope with increasing detachment from the family unit (for example, the mother as primary care-giver), and how to relate to others who are not family, or even not familiar. This can create some anxiety and dependency in children. In a testing situation that involved cooperating with other children, the degree of familiarity with the social setting would need to be considered, and the child's needs for recognition and secure affirmation attended to. As well, the child would probably be very sensitive to negative feedback. Montessori (1912) has talked about the fact that children generally experience failure for the first time in the classroom.

With physical issues, developmental variation is quite common. Children's bodies are still growing, and they are still developing both fine and large motor skills. Tests that require students to write their answers or draw pictures might be simply measuring fine motor skills rather than underlying linguistic abilities. Brain researchers have found that physical movement is correlated with neuronal connections (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007). Allowing a student some opportunities for movement while testing, rather than sitting still, would be a more natural accommodation. Classes can sometimes reach up to 40 students, but hopefully MEXT policies will start to take effect on reducing class sizes at less than 35 students (MEXT, 2001). Also, because group activities tend to be more cooperative and encourage social interaction, as well as lessening the pressure to perform as indiviudals (Paul, 2003, 41ff), group-oriented assessment might be a more effective way to assess a child's communicative abilities, and this could divide the load with a large class.

Literacy factors

Second, *literacy experiences* vary greatly from child to child. Some children enter the class having been read to often by the parents, where other children may not yet have developed the association from sound to symbol (Dyson and Genishi, 1993, 127). In an increasingly audio-visual wired world, the TV can play a large role in determining and limiting exposure to written materials (Puckett and Black, 2002, 481). First

language children have the advantage of more or less developed oracy. When approaching a second language, however, developing L2 oracy parallels L2 literacy. Yet, at the same time, the assessment tradition often relies heavily on a written format as noted by Maley (Ioannou-Georgio and Pavlou, 2003, iii). Children from an EFL environment have the added difficulty of using language that has no connection to their worlds of experience. Asian EFL contexts almost without exception require students to learn a completely different alphabet and script, which is not the case in many European countries (France, Germany, Italy, etc while using different languages use the a similar romantic alphabet), giving a distinct advantage to European children versus Japanese, Korean or Chinese children when taking age-appropriate tests, like Council of Europe (COE) tests or the Cambridge tests. This can explain the emphasis most Japanese elementary school programs place on speaking and listening alone; yet, Paul (2003, 83) suggests that such obstacles are not necessarily insurmountable, if the assessment material is pitched at a simpler level, and in a way that engages the child.

Vulnerability factors

Third, apart from handicaps, all things being equal, children generally learn a first language fluently. It is only when learning an unfamiliar topic in the school setting that children first become *vulnerable* to a sense of their own inadequacy (ie EFL). An extended quote from Montessori (1912, p. 237) can help illustrate the point:

> A widespread prejudice [is]… the belief that the child left to himself gives absolute repose to his mind. If this were so he would remain a stranger to the world, and, instead, we see him, little by little, spontaneously conquer various ideas and words. He is a traveler through life, who observes the new things among which he journeys, and who tries to understand the unknown tongues spoken by those around him. Indeed, he makes a great and *voluntary* effort to understand and to imitate.
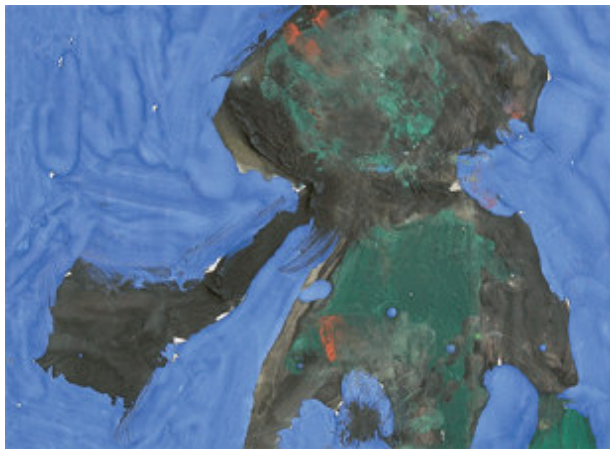
Fig 1. "Great job, Mariko!" Turns to wife and whispers:"um, honey, what is it??"

In a healthy nurturing home, then, the child experiences positive feedback from primary caregivers and family members. Praise is often connected to effort, and success is arbitrary. The exchange is made more on the basis of "look at me" and "look at what I done", and from the child's point of view they may amount to the same thing: self-worth is based on the assessment of my achievement (see figure 1), but not necessarily its degree of quality or quantity.

From these exchanges, the child develops a sense of worth and value, which is affirmed constantly in the home setting, and this quality of family interactions and communication patterns has profound downstream effects upon later achievement in the school setting (Amatea, Smith-Adcock, and Villares, 2006). In the classroom setting, suddenly the child may be thrust into an experience of receiving negative feedback (for the first time) from her new primary caregiver (for the first time). This makes the child especially vulnerable to testing situations which provide feedback and achievement scores, and may slant a teacher's perspective toward that child's achievement and progress. This kind of testing can become important way stations for making crucial administrative and pedagogical decisions for later schooling, even though standardized tests for young children can often be hampered by validity and reliability problems (such as in the USA, as described by Goodwin and Goodwin, 1993, 456). They found, for example, that many content areas that should be measured in young children (for example, motivational competence) are ignored; what measures are used often don't correspond to actual performance (for example, language readiness); and finally, the end-users of such testing are not trained or competent in their interpretation or application. A very important point they raise is the issue of what children should be tested for: what they **can** do, rather than what they cannot, and this fits in well with the MEXT's stated policy for language

education to be stress-free and to engender positive attitudes and a sense of success.

Testing guidelines

By combining ideas from Goodwin and Goodwin (1993), Hasselgreen (2005), McKay (2006), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1997), several suggestions for testing YLLs can be derived. Careful introduction of the activities and materials should be given individually tailored to each child to respect her developmental level. During the assessment process, support should be continuously provided, and be related directly and concretely to immediate performance of the child to make it more salient.

Testing scenarios that set up a child for testing, and then leave them to independently "sink or swim" with the process is not advisable with younger children is. Given the child's vulnerabilities and need for security, assessment should be conducted in familiar settings. The place where the child usually learns is the best place to elicit optimal performance. The people whom the child trusts (the homeroom teacher) can provide the most appropriate feedback and support. The process the child undergoes should be continuous, seamless extensions of activities the child already has engaged during regular lessons. Assessment should elicit optimal performance, focusing on what the child *can* do rather than on deficits, to give the child a sense of success with the materials, and a clear sense that she is progressing and achieving.

One of the most important outcomes of assessment is to create positive attitudes to language and learning – far from the "exam hell" characteristic of later learning stages. Exam hell refers to the period of time in which Japanese students prepare for taking entrance examinations at top-ranking universities. The process is grueling, mind-numbingly intense, and miserable, so much so that many students arrive at university burnt out, or keep re-taking the exam so that they can go to the school of their choice. Newspapers often signal the advent of exam season with an article decrying the practice, such as Gordenker (2002) in the Japan Times.

Finally, because children are at such variance in development, assessment should: a) directly observe performance, not extrapolate it from paper-and-pencil proxies; b)

be flexibly applied to give adequate coverage of a spectrum of skill sets; and c) be given in series, at many times, since a one-shot application will not be indicative of the progression the child is making from day-to-day.

Assessment Portfolios: Evaluation and Application

Assessment portfolios meet every one of the guidelines outlined above. Because they are conducted in the classroom by the homeroom teacher, they can be given in ways sensitive to individual children's needs, and in a familiar place using familiar procedures. The teacher is best placed to observe her young learners continuously, and the placement of portfolios in classroom bookshelves for easy access by the children allows them to be continuously updated, reflected over, and negotiated upon, so that they represent the best samples of the student's performance.

Assessment portfolios can contain checklists with instructional objectives on regular activities; rating scales, that could handle skills with several components (eg. following directions in different situations); screening tests; anecdotal records, which are restricted to factual observations and non-judgmental records on the child's performance; the child's own notes, self-evaluation efforts, journal entries, and in general examples of the child's best work culled from writing assignments, drawings and craftwork, and audio performances.

Extensive reading checklist

Name _____   Class _____

	Date	Comment
enjoys reading		
can identify the title and author of a reading text		
can identify the main characters		
can grasp the plot of an extensive reading text		
actively seeks opportunities to read		
can grasp the main ideas of a text		
can talk about the main characters		
reads a variety of books		
can deduce meaning from context without being obstructed by unknown words		
can summarize a text/narrate a story		
can evaluate a text		

Figure 2. Checklist

Checklists. Figure 2 below shows a reading checklist (Ioannou-Georgio, S. & Pavlou, P., 2003, 31). The idea here is that a child's progress can be captured in steps, and can show partial achievement. The list can be added to over time, as the child develops the skills. It would be very important for the teacher to bear in that positive comments are of paramount importance. As well, notice that no grade or score is provided. What is more informative is a language skill criterion (i.e. "reads a variety of books"), rather than have an arbitrary number (i.e. 9 out 10), which communicates little or nothing about the student's actual accomplishment.

Also important to bear in mind is that this material is derived from an ESL source (Oxford University Press), and so many of the skills shown here might be characteristic of high schools rather than elementary schools in Japan. More appropriate content for an EFL context might be "can identify letters", "can follow the main story by drawing a cartoon panel", etc. Graded level readers even pose some difficulty. When dealing with absolute beginners, "stories" might only consist of pictures with single word or phrase descriptors.

While MEXT does not currently envision including reading in its elementary curriculum, Nikolova (2008) offers a compelling argument for its inclusion. According to the Ministry of Education's own survey, allowing reading in the class is something the kids say that they want. Nikolova also suggests that reading activities give students more choice over their learning content. Finally, much content in middle school and high school concentrates on reading materials, so having students start early at acquiring literacy skills in a communicative content should only accelerate their learning capacity in later years.

Rating scales. The child herself would use this scale to indicate the depth and breadth of her knowledge on a particular topic. In Figure 3 below (McKay, 2006, 192), the child would write or draw anything she knew about the topic "insects." Again, in Japan, "insect" might be too abstract a concept for young children to know, or even more importantly to *use*, so a more common descriptor like "bugs", or even a picture of a generic-looking bug, might be more appropriate. This is the kind of activity that can be given to the child without any notion that "testing" or "assessment" is being done. This can be woven seamlessly into a lesson.
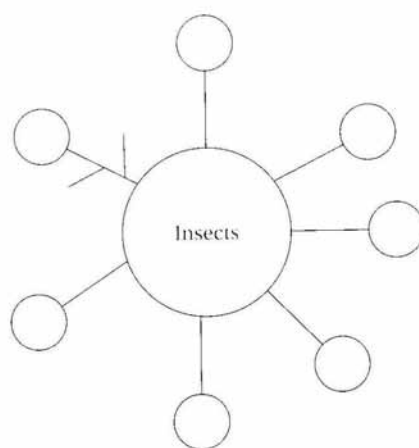
Figure 3. Rating scale

When a child has gone through several lessons, and has completed rating scales for several, she can choose for herself what scale she thinks represents her best work, and this can be placed in her portfolio. The portfolio contents can be added to or removed as time goes on, so if a better rating scale appears, it can replace the older. Furthermore, if a child's knowledge of bugs increases, this scale can easily accommodate that expanding knowledge domain. Again one should remember not to use score or grade, but only a happy face to indicate the teacher's acknowledgement of effort (Paul, 2003, 115ff).

Screening tests. These are given to children when they embark upon their course of learning, to give the teacher some indication of their entry-level point. These represent a little more of a sticky issue. In ESL settings, the use of Council of Europe

or Cambridge University (COE) based tests is perhaps more common (see figure 4 a & b for rating level examples). In Japan, MEXT is planning on implementing an English program from grades 5. Yet the COE guidelines expect children to be ready to "give a short prepared talk" in which they "give their opinions". Such a guideline would of course be inappropriate to expect in a curriculum which only has one hour of English content per week. COE breakthrough level, the beginner level, does not give sound-letter association any recognition even at a grade 1 level. Vocabulary items are recognized only when embedded within a communicative context ("tell what the weather is like").

Figure 4a. Screening test levels, grades 1 – 3   Figure 4b. Screening test levels, grades 4 – 6

Again, in an EFL context, a screening test would need to be broken down into smaller steps. At the same time, Japan is increasingly becoming a more heterogeneous society. The luxury of assuming and therefore treating every student as the same is not warranted. Some children come from bilingual homes, or have had extensive experience living abroad, and screening tests need to take those factors into account. If levels are over-simplified, and that plateau at a level far below a bilingual child's level, that child may well be forced to take boring and tedious classes, with teachers who speak less English than they do (cf. Riordan, 2005). Being vulnerable, a child may feel compelled to submerge their linguistic advantage, or be shushed or punished by the teacher if they demonstrate it. Goto-Butler (2007) also points to growing presence of foreign residents living in Japan, comprising 1.5% of the total population, which is a 50% increase over the last ten years, and currently these children are not

cared for in the current system.

Anecdotal records. In figure 5 (below), a portfolio review is provided (Ioannou-Georgio & Pavlou, 2003, p. 28). In this example, the teacher assesses the child's development across a range of language modalities. This is an important consideration, as children may show differential progress, with some better at fine motor control (writing) than other areas (talking less because of shyness). I wonder if these types of reviews might fall by default to the native speaker teacher or teaching assistant, and thus if the use of English in the review might take away the benefit. The review, of course, is not done just to satisfy some administrative prerogative, but more importantly is done in an effort to communicate with both the parents (who may not speak English themselves) and the child, who will not understand many of the terms or their implications (terms like improve, context, unknown, handwriting, combining, paragraphs, etc). Thus it could be given in Japanese as well.

The use of this kind of review would also be restricted due to classroom size (hard to do this with 30 or 40 kids in a class, based on one hour of observation), and the teacher's already overburdened schedule (yet one more report!). Thus, in Japan, the review form would have to be simplified in several ways: with MEXT prioritizing speaking, and having no reading or writing components in the elementary curriculum, this cuts the content in half.

Portfolio review

Name _____ Alice _____ Class _____ 2 _____ Term _____ Spring _____

Area	Overall achievement	Strengths	Needs and future action
Reading	Very good	– Loves books and reads a lot. – Uses pictures and context to understand unknown words.	– Needs to improve her reading speed and learn to read silently. – Should continue with readers during holidays.
Writing	Good	– Her handwriting and spelling have improved.	– Has a few problems with combining sentences. – Should practise writing short paragraphs (2–3 sentences).
Speaking	Good	– Always eager to use English. – Can talk about herself and her daily activities.	– Fluency hampered by frequent gaps in vocabulary. – Should try to increase her vocabulary.
Listening	Very good	– Can easily grasp main idea/gist of a listening text.	– Does not always recognize spoken form of words in her vocabulary. – Try listening to tapes of stories with the book open.
Attitude to English	Excellent	– Loves learning English and is always enthusiastic about her lessons.	

Teacher's signature _____   Child's signature _____

Parent's signature _____

Figure 5. Anecdotal – Portfolio review

More details about the kind of syllabus content, and a check on the child's grasp of associated content, would be helpful (ie. the review says "her handwriting has improved", but does not indicate in what way? Neater? More content? More artistic in combination with graphics?). It cannot be emphasized enough, that children follow altogether normal and *different* paths of development, and to compare one child with another is tantamount to saying that there is *one* path to development that all children should follow in tandem. Montessori (1912, p. 107) referred to these types of activities as collective lessons, because it places limits on children to develop and

experiment in their own way. Paul (2003) agrees that such child-centered approaches to teaching, and by extension assessment, should be tailored to individuals, and not as a collective, norming exercise.
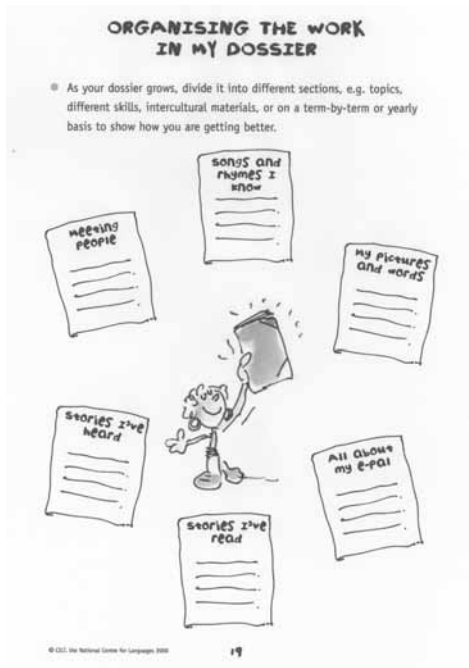

Figure 6. Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation. Although the rating scale in shown in figure 3 earlier, was a particular and highly specific kind of self-evaluation, this document can also be more generic in content. Figure 6 (National Center for Languages, 2006, p. 19) is an example of a more generic kind. In this, a child keeps an ongoing list of her accomplishments in English. The format might have to change in the Japanese context: if writing is not a curriculum objective, students would then need to log their deeds in a pictorial fashion, rather than writing or listing them.

At the same time, if MEXT does decide to include basic reading and writing skills in the curriculum, I would suggest that MEXT avoid the traditional method for teaching kanji, as described by Reid (1998, pp. 141ff) and the experience his daughter had in elementary school. He describes a curriculum in which his daughter, along with other elementary school students, learned 80 kanji characters in 1st grade, 160 in 2nd grade. This increased to 200 in 3rd grade, etc, until they graduated from high school with about 2000 characters learned. Even though some children may already have known the content, students were led to practice drawing the character hundreds of times, at which point, "everyone moved on the next character… [and] the same characters in the same way in precise lockstep with everybody else" (Reid, 1998, pp. 142–143).

The repetitive process might be understandable for learning a system in which

there are so many different characters and so little time in which to learn them; on the other hand, the 24-letter English alphabet is much simpler to learn, and perhaps could be taught through flashcard games and artistically-driven projects (posters, pictures, etc) that were more inclined to a child's individual nature (Paul, 2003, p. 88ff; Montessori, 1912, p. 246ff). Repetition may indeed occur, but is determined by the child, not the teacher, to a need that she perceives, and may continue to experiment with the content in different contexts, and at a time which correspond to the child's inner schedule, not outward mandates (Montessori, 1912, 346ff).
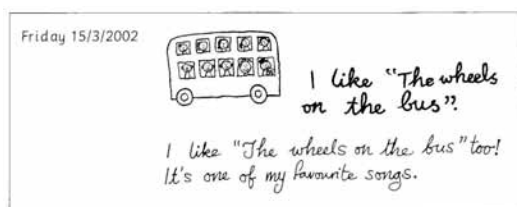

Figure 7. Journal entry

Journals. A learning journal would be an opportunity for the child to reflect on what they had learned that day. Figure 7 is an example of what such a written form could look like (Ioannou-Georgio & Pavlou, 2003, p. 119).

Given the de-emphasis on writing in the Japanese curriculum, the teacher would probably need to exchange a written text with a purely pictorial representation. Perhaps an alternative could involve children make journal entries via an iPod. Even just a sentence or two, or some words sounded into the device, could make for an interesting online record for parents to listen in on. Notice that the teacher only responds to the content in a positive way. There is no *evaluation* of effort, and achievement is viewed simply towards recognizing the effort that was made, and affirming the experience that the child had as valuable.

Conclusion

Children differ in their rates of development and in their approaches to learning in many ways. These differences should be celebrated and nurtured. Now that MEXT is about to introduce English content into the elementary level curriculum, teaching and learning can be held accountable in a way that can be of service to all stakeholders (especially to parents and their children), in a way that is enjoyable, easy to

understand, trustworthy, and one that can improve upon traditional practices that may not have given enough attention to YL differences in the past. To do this, the use of assessment portfolios is fundamental. This paper has shown with various examples that portfolios can be individually tailored to each child's learning experience, through encouraging teacher feedback which does not attempt to norm performances, and is negotiated with the young learner over the entire course of learning, in a way that shows progress through observed skill development.

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Teacher Autonomy and Professional Teacher Development:

Exploring the Necessities for Developing Teacher Autonomy in EFL

Japanese Contexts

Atsushi Iida
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

Bio Data:

Atsushi Iida is currently a doctoral candidate in the Composition and TESOL Program and an instructor of Japanese in the Critical Languages Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana PA. He received his Master of Arts with TESOL at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2007. His research interests include L2 writing, creative writing, learner autonomy, weblog-based pedagogy and ESL/ EFL methodology.

Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to examine how EFL Japanese teachers can develop teacher autonomy. Teacher autonomy is related to various components including both individual teacher's psychological factors such as motivation, stress, or job dissatisfaction and social factors which include school systems or educational policies provided by the government. Likewise, working time, workload and wage have affected teacher autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). In order to achieve the purpose of the study, this paper will first define what 'teacher autonomy' is and then explore what components are included within the concept. Also, it will discuss how teacher autonomy can be fostered from both viewpoints of career-long English language learners and professional teacher development. Finally, this study will provide some suggestions for developing teacher autonomy. The study is researched from a micro aspect, meaning that it focuses on what EFL Japanese teachers can do in their given contexts.

Key words: teacher autonomy; professional teacher development; EFL Japanese contexts

English language teaching (ELT) in Japan has been gradually changing over the past five years. With a goal, set by the Ministry of Education, of 'fostering Japanese who can use practical English', the focus of ELT has shifted from teaching the grammatical aspects to developing communicative language proficiency. However, there are many teachers who apply traditional approaches such as Grammar-Translation Method or Audiolingual Method into their own contexts, because the fact remains that grammatical knowledge of English is a key component to passing entrance examinations. From this viewpoint, students are motivated to study English by memorizing as many vocabulary items and grammatical points as possible, not by developing communicative language ability, because receiving a better test score is a shortcut to being accepted into better schools and at the same time, it is an efficient way to survive in society.

The fact is that many teachers struggle with their given situations. Some teachers have a dilemma between what they want to teach and what they have to teach; other teachers are irritated by the situation in which they want to devote their own time to exploring and developing their teaching but they cannot. This is due to their heavy workload, which is often directly unrelated to teaching English such as coaching a baseball team in school, participating in regular teacher's meetings, or monitoring students to maintain school discipline. Still others struggle with serious gaps between the goals of ELT and the students' needs of language learning. Likewise, it is true that language teachers must teach English following both a national curriculum and school policies. In these contexts, how can language teachers maintain and develop their motivation to teach? How can language teachers teach the English effectively to achieve the goal in ELT? Ultimately, how can language teachers foster teacher autonomy under those dilemmas?

This paper describes teacher autonomy from two aspects: developing teacher autonomy as continuous English language learners; and fostering teacher autonomy as professional teacher development.

Definition of Teacher Autonomy

The concept of teacher autonomy in second and foreign language teaching is comparably new, and has a broad meaning. The theory of teacher autonomy which, in general, involves a high degree of abstraction, may intersect with the definition of learner autonomy which is generally situated within a specific context of 'what I am doing and why I am doing so' (Benson, 2002).

The fundamental perspective of teacher autonomy is, as Shaw (2002) defined, "the capacity to take control of one's own teaching" (p. 2). Likewise, Little and Tort-Moloney have considered teacher autonomy to be a "teacher's capacity to engage in self-directed teaching" (as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 1). In other words, teacher autonomy refers to the 'capacity' to manage one's own teaching. However, the concept of teacher autonomy varies depending on researchers. There are two different dimensions of the concept: teacher autonomy refers to freedom or isolation from any powers from others; and autonomy implies interaction, negotiation, and collaboration.

Little has stated "essentially, autonomy is a capacity-for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action" (as cited in Benson, 2002, p. 2). Benson's definition of teacher autonomy has referred to "right to freedom from control" (as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 1). In other words, the first dimension is to regard autonomy as being independent of control by others. In contrast, the second aspect includes the notion of 'interdependence' and the social significance. Holliday (2005) used the term, 'social autonomy' to argue the significance of language teachers being constantly critical and aware of the social influences and implications of what they do. Smith (2003) also argued the necessity of collaboration, such as sharing ideas or discussing problems with one's peers. The definition of teacher autonomy, in detail, was described in the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) conference held in 2001: "… teacher autonomy is a socially constructed process, where teacher support and development groups can act as teachers-learner pools of diverse knowledge, experience, equal power and autonomous learning" (as cited in Barfield et al., 2002, p. 5). That is to say, collaboration, negotiation, and interaction are the essence of teacher autonomy, and those factors construct the process of encouraging

language teachers to become autonomous.

This study takes both dimensions, and defines teacher autonomy as the capacity for language teachers to take charge of and explore their own teaching and in a given context using both individual and social process. Reflecting on EFL Japanese contexts, the fact is that language teachers must teach English under a high degree of control from government and their respective school. Taking just the first dimension may be only an ideal, because every teacher belongs to a community and teaches the language as a member of the community. 'Isolation' or 'independence' can be a negative aspect in the society where the idea of 'group' is being highlighted. However, it is a true that the notion of 'independence' for developing teacher autonomy is important in terms of establishing and taking responsibility for one's own teaching. In other words, a principal perspective of the concept is for language teachers to keep a balance between personal autonomy and social autonomy.

Necessity to develop Teacher Autonomy

A primary reason why the concept is necessary for Japanese teachers of English is to keep up with the innovation of ELT in Japan. Many changes are seen in every aspect. For instance, even in the entrance examination, the National Center Test for University Admissions started to include a listening comprehension test two years ago. Likewise, the Ministry of Education has identified several public and private high schools as Super English Language High Schools (SELHi) every year, in order to cultivate 'Japanese with English abilities'. These schools are directed to develop effective English teaching methods and curricula within three years depending on their own goals of ELT. Along with the SELHi project, English classes will be required starting in the 5th grade in elementary schools by 2011. In this way, the English educational system has evolved its main goal: to foster Japanese who can use practical English.

With the reformation of the educational system, local teachers are required to adjust to the new structure. Here, the concept of teacher autonomy is necessary for those teachers. Vye et al. (2002) described that language teaching is contextually

situated, and teacher autonomy is the process of exploration of how language teachers can foster students' learner autonomy by grasping and coping with many external restrictions and adjusting them into opportunities for change. So, language teachers are expected to develop the flexibility to use teaching approaches that are the most appropriate for their given contexts.

Another reason for the necessity to foster teacher autonomy is due to the ultimate goal of ELT in Japan: learning the target language while fostering learner autonomy. Developing autonomous learners is one of the overall goals of the Japanese educational system. In this situation, language teachers are expected to be models of successful language learners and are required to promote learner autonomy as EFL learners. Little, McGrath, Smith, and Tort-Moloney have claimed that "teachers who themselves are not autonomous language learners may have a negative influence on the development of autonomy in their students" (as cited in Sert, 2006, p. 186). From this viewpoint, teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are inseparable for language teachers. Smith (2003) used the term "teacher-learner autonomy" for the relationship and emphasized the significance of applying 'pedagogy for teacher-learner autonomy' to prepare teachers appropriately for their own engagement in a pedagogy for autonomy with students (p. 6). EFL teachers are language teachers and at the same time, language learners. Therefore, it is essential to develop both sides of autonomy.

The "apprenticeship of observation" used by Lortie can be the other reason (as cited in Sert, 2006, p. 187). This is a so-called 'banking system', which is the idea that language teachers teach a language like they are taught as learners. Almost all of the current English teachers were taught the language through Grammar Translation Method, and they may be inclined to use the same approach. This is the completely contradictory method to develop students' communication skills and foster learner autonomy. If current teachers would not apply a different approach, prospective teachers might teach as they have been taught. This phenomenon would bring about a much more serious gap between the policies issued by the Ministry of Education and the perspectives of local teachers, and a variety of useful teaching approaches would be just an 'ideal' for them. To avoid this situation, language teachers are required to

become aware of teacher autonomy. Autonomous teachers are those who can take control of their own language teaching (Shaw, 2002) and who can gain awareness of exploring their own teaching in terms of professional teacher development.

Factors Affecting Teacher Autonomy

As discussed above, teacher autonomy refers to the ability of language teachers to take charge of and explore their own teaching, but the ambiguity of the concept remains. This section discusses various factors of teacher autonomy focusing on the following viewpoints: what factors can promote and impede teacher autonomy; and who is referred to as autonomous teachers.

Shaw (2002) discussed four factors which can influence teacher autonomy: policy factors, institutional factors, conceptions of language, and language teaching methodologies. Policy factors consist of elements external to the school. In the Japanese context, a national curriculum or educational system determined by the Ministry of Education can be seen as one of the principle factors restricting teacher autonomy. Institutional factors are based on components internal to the school. Each school sets up the educational rules following educational policies issued by the government, and teachers are required to follow these limitations. Conceptions of language include dominant ideas regarding what English is or ideologies of standard usage of the language, and these notions can be imposed by the system, the institution or teacher's colleagues (Shaw, 2002). Language teaching methodologies dominated by the above three factors, especially standard language ideologies refer to constraining factors on a teacher's freedom to make the right choices for learners (Shaw, 2002). In this way, the perceptions of autonomy are interrelated to various factors within working environments, and the development of teacher autonomy depends on the will of the students and teachers' adaptability to the contexts of teaching and learning where they find themselves (Benson, 2001).

Pearson and Moomaw (2006) discussed teacher autonomy in terms of teacher's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: intrinsic factors which consist of individual satisfaction such as desire to assist students to accomplish goals, desire to make a

difference in society and sense of achievement when students learn; extrinsic factors which are comprised of external elements including wage, nonmonetary fringe benefits and recognition of performance. The U.S. National Institute of Education reported that "intrinsic rewards are much more powerful for motivating teachers than are extrinsic rewards, such as merit pay" (as cited in Pearson & Moomaw, 2006, p.44). In other words, intrinsic motivation, especially job satisfaction, contributes to the degree of teacher autonomy, while job dissatisfaction including stress, pressure or teacher burnout results in negative outcomes for teacher autonomy. In addition, Davis and Wilson (2000) argued that "the more intrinsically motivated teachers are, the more motivated and satisfied they are with their jobs and the less stress they experience" (as cited in Pearson & Moomaw, 2006, p. 45). Furthermore, the high degree of autonomy perceived by language teachers indicates current job satisfaction and a positive reaction to teaching and suggests the willingness to enter teaching again if confronted with such a decision (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). In this way, autonomy and intrinsic motivation depend much on metacognitive awareness in language teaching. As motivation has both positive and negative impacts on fostering learner autonomy in second language learning (Harmer, 2001), it is also one of the crucial factors to determine success or failure to develop teacher autonomy.

Components of Teacher Autonomy

A variety of factors affect the development of teacher autonomy. However, having considered the concept from both theoretical and practical aspects, two questions come up: what components are included in the concept of teacher autonomy; and more specifically, who can be regarded as autonomous teachers.

Barfield et al. (2002) proposed that teacher autonomy involves the following elements: negotiation skills; institutional knowledge to start to discuss efficiently limitations on teaching and learning; willingness to deal with institutional barriers in socially appropriate ways to turn constraints into opportunities for change; readiness to engage in lifelong learning to the best of an individual's capacities; reflection of on the teaching process and contexts; and devotion to promoting learner autonomy. From

this viewpoint, a teacher can be regarded as autonomous not only by being a professional teacher but also by being a lifelong language learner. In terms of being a professional teacher, language teachers are required to engage in professional teacher development through the exploration of many possibilities to develop their teaching in their specific teaching contexts. Likewise, language teachers, especially EFL Japanese teachers are language learners, and they are expected to become a 'model' of successful and autonomous language learners in their class. Smith (2000) mentioned that it is unreasonable to expect language teachers to develop autonomy in their students if they themselves do not know what it is to be autonomous learners and how they can nurture learner autonomy. Hence, it is necessary for language teachers to develop awareness of both teacher and learner autonomy. Becoming aware of their interpretation of learner autonomy and of their beliefs of language teaching is the essence of nurturing learner and teacher autonomy (Martinez, 2002).

Barfield et al. (2002) have also insisted that promoting teacher autonomy overlaps with principles of developing learner autonomy, and the interrelationship between two concepts becomes apparent "when the values of co-learning, self-direction, collaboration, and democratic co-participation are consciously highlighted" (p.6). From this point of view, many researchers emphasize the significance of the following three critical principles for teacher autonomy: critical reflective inquiry, empowerment, dialogue (e.g. Barfield et al., 2002; Vye et al., 2002; Smith, 2003). These three principles can allow language teachers to develop institutional knowledge and flexibility within their individual teaching contexts. Processes through which these principles of action can be reached are based on observing, inquiring negotiating, evaluating, and developing through collaboration with students and teacher peers, and these processes are made explicit through dialogue and critical reflective inquiry, the richness of which empowers teacher autonomy and assists in developing the concept further (Barfield et al., 2002). Consciousness of fostering teacher autonomy can be raised by conducting research within teacher training or professional teacher development in a given context (Martinez, 2002).

In this way, the concept of fostering teacher autonomy consists of the following

two viewpoints in second or foreign language teaching: fostering learner autonomy as a life-long learner and professional teacher development as a teacher. As learner autonomy can be nurtured by self-monitoring and self-reflecting on the process of language learning including planning, implementing, and assessing (Scharle & Szabo, 2000), awareness of teacher autonomy can be raised through the process of self-reflecting on one's language teaching in terms of how it works or how it does not work, and exploring various possibilities to make one's own teaching better by using collaborative approaches with colleagues. From this point of view, autonomous teachers can be regarded as those who have a high degree of capacity for self-directed professional teaching and for self-directed teacher-learning, establishing freedom from control over their teaching (Smith, 2003).

How Teacher Autonomy Can Be Fostered

The concept of teacher autonomy is necessary for EFL Japanese teachers from both standpoints: as a learner and as a teacher. The fact is that veteran teachers are inclined to have access to participate in self-directed professional teaching and self-directed teacher-learning while novice teachers have few opportunities to become autonomous due to their lack of teaching experience. In this situation, how can novices gain a greater awareness of teacher autonomy? This section discusses, from practical aspects, how teacher autonomy can be promoted in a given teaching context, especially how EFL Japanese middle and high school teachers can develop autonomy while coping with some constraints that they encounter.

Developing Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is defined as the capacity to take responsibility to decide what to learn, when and how to learn it by taking charge of one's own learning (Sert, 2006). EFL Japanese teachers are required to become 'models' of autonomous and successful language learners in class. Likewise, they are expected to demonstrate how they have developed their learner autonomy and to teach their students how to be autonomous learners. Since their students, learning styles and even backgrounds are different from

each other, language teachers need to show their students various approaches to nurture autonomy in their own language learning. Hence, it is necessary for teachers to reflect on their own language learning and to become aware of exploring alternatives in their learning process. Cotterall (2000) regarded reflection as a "metacognitive activity of reviewing past and future learning experiences in order to enhance learning" (p. 112), and reflection is one of the necessary processes for language learners to move on to their future learning, especially in terms of planning their learning.

A point of disagreement is the way language teachers self-reflect on their own language learning within a limited time. Each researcher is inclined to use a different phrase: 'record booklet' (Cotterall, 1995), 'self-reports' (Wenden, 1991), and 'learning journals' (Harmer, 2001), and 'keeping diaries' (Thanasoulas, 2000) but the concept of these phrases is almost the same. It refers to 'keeping journal entries' and the journal is comprised of both self-assessment and self-monitoring.

Keeping journal entries provides learners with opportunities to self-monitor and self-reflect on their own learning. One of the fundamental perspectives of the application is that language teachers as learners need to keep journals with the preparation of one specific solution as well as other possible resolutions for issues, because their students might encounter the same problems as the teachers also had when they were at the student's level of English ability. By doing so, their students can have multiple chances to explore their own ways to learn English through the process of attempting to use various approaches. This idea reflects the notion of 'learner choice' mentioned by Lee (1998), in which learner autonomy is composed of making decisions in learning, such as setting goals, defining progressions, choosing strategies and approaches, monitoring learning processes, and evaluating the outcome of learning. One practice that language teachers need to keep in mind for this application is to take notes on what they did and what happened in their learning process with descriptive stances. Judgmental and prescriptive comments prevent language teachers from exploring many opportunities to become autonomous learners, and the limitation of possibilities can have negative impacts on the development of

autonomy in their students.

There are many approaches for language teachers to develop their language proficiency, but a vital influence which determines the approaches they use in their learning process is their metacognitive skills. The primary idea of fostering autonomy refers to the development of metacognitive skills. Therefore, it is significant for language teachers to nurture learner autonomy through self-reflection or self-monitoring in their own language learning process.

Developing Teacher Autonomy

The concept of professional teacher development may come from teachers breaking some teaching rules to see their own teaching differently (Gebhard & Oprandy, 2005). Accordingly, EFL Japanese teachers can gain awareness of different perspectives of language teaching. Seeing their own teaching from different aspects can allow them to discover some clues to make their teaching more effective and to develop their autonomy. Professional teacher development can be carried out in both individual and collaborative ways.

One of the useful approaches for teacher development is action research (Benson, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Daoud, 2002; Erdogan, 2002; Gebhard & Oprandy, 2005). In fact, a great deal of research on autonomy has been based on reflection and reasoning (Benson, 2001). In addition, Daoud's (2002) study indicates that action research contributes to teacher autonomous learning and teacher autonomy assists in promoting learner autonomy. The goal of action research is to find resolutions of problems posed and identified (Gebhard & Oprandy, 2005). Action research includes a series of procedures language teachers can engage in to improve some aspects of their teaching (Harmer, 2001), more specifically, the processes to achieve the goal set by problem-posing. In other words, action research allows teachers to develop their teaching through the process of discovering, posing, and possibly solving problems in language teaching. Cotterall and Crabbe (2002) also argued the effectiveness of using a problem-solution framework which enables teachers to explicitly explore and discover possible solutions to specific student's learning difficulties in class.

Likewise, since action research can be a community effort, it can allow language teachers to work collaboratively through the discussion with colleagues who provide their support and experience (Gebhard & Oprandy, 2005). This feature is crucial for the concept of teacher autonomy, because this method enables language teachers to obtain new ideas to determine what they could do in the classroom. Action research which provides language teachers with chances to make more informed teaching decisions, to develop skills for posing and solving teaching problems, to expand reflective skills, and to create a forum to discuss teaching issues can encourage them to become aware of their own teaching. In this way, action research includes the three components necessary for developing teacher autonomy, which are critical reflective inquiry, empowerment, and dialogue.

Self-observation is another way to develop teaching. The primary purpose of self-observation is for language teachers to construct and reconstruct their own knowledge about teaching (Gebhard & Oprandy, 2005). The notion of the approach is to find patterns of teaching and explore alternatives for teaching, so, different from action research, at the starting point of self-observation, it isn't necessary to identify problems in language teaching. Through a process of videotaping (or audiotaping), describing, analyzing, and interpreting the teaching, language teachers can develop an awareness of and learn more about their own teaching. In this way, self-observation is a useful approach, but it may be more effective for language teachers to incorporate the notion of 'collaboration' into the approach by going beyond the concept of 'self'. This is because teacher autonomy is a socially constructed process and it can be strengthened by "collaborative support and networking both within the institution and beyond" (Barfield et al., 2002, p. 5). A possibility is to create opportunities to meet with colleagues and discuss their self-observation reports. Dialogues with teacher peers can allow language teachers to get new perspectives and to reconstruct knowledge about teaching by sharing and discussing various issues that they have encountered in their own teaching. Negotiation, thus, constructs an integration of the process of fostering teacher autonomy.

Peer observation is another technique. Peer observation is conducted with peer

teaching. One formal approach is that two teachers organize a lesson, and one teaches while the other observes the class; and after the lesson, both teachers describe what happened in the classroom and detail their experience of the lesson, and discuss how the lesson could be modified next time on the basis of the descriptions; and for the next class, the role is reversed (Harmer, 2001). Peer observation enables two teachers to explore their own teaching and collaboration helps the participants develop as teachers. Dymoke and Harrison (2006) pointed out how peer observation provides language teachers, especially novice teachers, with chances to develop their own teaching by being observing and receiving feedback from peer or veteran teachers. However, language teachers must keep in mind that both self and peer observation should be conducted with descriptive and non-judgmental agendas, not prescriptive stances (Gebhard & Oprandy, 2005). In addition, teacher peers must have equal power (Harmer, 2001). Prescriptive, judgmental, and even unequal stances can prohibit language teachers from engaging in professional development and those factors can result in a bad relationship between teachers. The principal idea of peer observation is for language teachers to explore various possibilities for their own teaching and expand their knowledge of teaching. Therefore, language teachers are required to recognize the purpose, goal and principal notion of the approach.

In addition to action research, self-observation, and peer observation, there are several other useful approaches for professional teacher development. For instance, reading professional literature or journals such as *TESOL Quarterly, ELT Journal, Asian EFL Journal, JALT Journal* etc. enables language teachers to gain awareness of what is currently happening in the field of ELT all over the world and to construct new knowledge about teaching and conducting classroom research. Attending conferences sponsored by JALT, JACET, or ELEC is also an effective way to develop as teachers. Such conferences can offer language teachers many opportunities to make a presentation of their own topics, to observe and discuss peer's teaching practices videotaped, to share ideas with critical peers, and to create a new social network in the ELT realm. This network can provide a collaborative teacher-support group beyond the institution. Furthermore, the application of the Internet provides new spaces for

developing teacher autonomy (e.g. Schwienhorst, 1999; Harmer, 2001). Internet correspondence creates a 'virtual community' and language teachers can exchange information with other language teachers all over the world. The use of the Internet or virtual community enables language teachers to interact, discuss, and negotiate a specific topic on a real time, and to reach authentic information resources (Schwienhorst, 1999). Many websites relevant to ELT provide the place to do so (e.g. *Dave's ESL Café, TESL-L*).

Another opportunity for professional development is to take additional courses or teaching practices in TESOL programs by attending not only Japanese (e.g. Sophia University, Tokyo) but also American graduate schools (e.g. Teachers College, Tokyo; Temple University, Japan Campus). It might be difficult for all language teachers to do so because of various constraints (e.g. the heavy teaching load, time limitations on the participation of programs), but this can provide them with great opportunities to explore alternatives in their teaching practices, more specifically, to develop their teaching approaches by combining new theories with their own teaching. Attending graduate schools can allow language teachers to expand their knowledge of teaching as well as to gain more awareness of how to engage in professional teacher development within a given context.

Compiling a teaching portfolio is another approach to professional teacher development. Richards and Schmidt (2002) mentioned that keeping a portfolio shows "evidence of mastery of knowledge" (p. 407) and allows language teachers to access and reflect on their work so that the portfolio, as a collection of work, illustrates their efforts, progress, or achievement in language teaching. Language teachers can add to their portfolios not only their teaching materials used in classes but also their analysis papers gained through action research, self-observation, or peer-observation. Most importantly, compiling a portfolio involves in deciding what to include in the portfolio according to their personal goals. It is, therefore, crucial for language teachers to focus on a specific point in their teaching and to use their portfolio as a reflective piece for their future teaching.

Conclusion

Suggestions for fostering Teacher Autonomy in EFL Japanese contexts

As mentioned above, teacher autonomy is influenced by various factors. The fact is that many EFL Japanese teachers face a dilemma between what they want to do and what they have to do, because of these constraints. Japanese contexts are comprised of the following elements: a national curriculum, an educational policy determined by the government, entrance examinations, a school curriculum, a school policy, students' needs or goals, the pressure from their parents, the power relationship between veteran (older) and less experienced (younger) teachers. EFL Japanese teachers are required to develop teacher autonomy with those limitations. Autonomy doesn't refer to isolation or independence from those factors. Those who try to ignore those aspects and pursue their own ideal risk their occupational future in Japan, a society where the idea of 'group' is heavily emphasized. It means that language teachers must develop not only personal but also social autonomy, and keep a balance between the two. However, one of the crucial questions is how EFL Japanese teachers can do so under those constraints.

An effective perspective is how language teachers can incorporate the three principles of fostering autonomy, which are critical reflective inquiry, empowerment, and dialogue, into their own teaching contexts. Language teachers can cope with this issue in two phases: establishing the process of self-directed language teaching; and creating a social network for professional teacher development. An important thought for teacher autonomy is, as Benson (2001) mentioned, that "[a]utonomy cannot be the result of the application of a method. The development of autonomy depends upon the will of the learners and our own adaptability to the contexts of teaching and learning in which we find ourselves" (pp. 177-178). In other words, it is necessary for EFL Japanese teachers to first modify and then apply approaches to be the most suitable for their context. Through the process of both language learning and professional teacher development, they need to attempt to find their own way to foster teacher autonomy. It is also indispensable to highlight the significance of 'process' rather than 'product' in their engagement, because this idea can allow language teachers to become aware of 'critical reflection' which is one of the key principles for promoting

teacher autonomy.

It is recommended that EFL Japanese teachers consider striving for more autonomy, both as language teachers and as language learners. What approach they use for developing autonomy doesn't matter at this point, rather it will be crucial to gain awareness of the concept of autonomy and understand their own teaching contexts. Reading professional literature or journals can provide them with principal ideas for teacher autonomy and can help them understand what they need to do. Whatever approaches EFL Japanese teachers use for their engagement, keeping journal entries will be helpful for their own language learning and teaching, because the journal will be one of the important resources for their own development and create a place to self-reflect on both language learning and teaching. Self-observation may be a good starting point for those who have no idea regarding what to do for their development. As mentioned above, self-observation is not a problem-solving approach but an opportunity to find patterns in language teaching. If language teachers have some issues in their self-observation, they could apply action research for their development. Likewise, taking notes in their journals of what happened in class and how they coped with issues they had encountered can allow them to reflect on their own process of teacher development as well as to be ready to discuss the topic with peer teachers. In this way, keeping journal entries is for their own personal use but it can be a helpful resource for collaborative learning as a personal 'voice'. In addition, language teachers can address a series of teacher development projects in conferences sponsored by JALT, JACET, or ELEC. Attending conferences can provide them with chances to construct or expand a social network for collaboration with peer teachers beyond their institution, and opportunities to share and discuss their ideas with peers who have a high degree of motivation of language teaching and attempt to achieve their goals to become autonomous teachers.

This is just one example for developing teacher autonomy. However, since there is no one best way to foster autonomy, it is crucial for EFL Japanese teachers to explore various ways for teacher development and find approaches to best fit into their own styles. Similar to language learning, language teaching including teacher development

is also an on-going process. It is a cycle of identifying, solving, and reflecting on problems which language teachers encounter in class. Depending on the given context, language teachers are expected to flexibly apply different teaching approaches with consideration of possible limitations. Therefore, EFL Japanese teachers need to develop a greater awareness of teacher autonomy while maintaining a high level of motivation to teach English, in order to keep up with the on-going innovation of ELT in Japan.

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