Integration of Autonomy, Reflection, and Collaboration in Pre- and In-Service EFL Teacher Education

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Abstract

Today, the Japanese education ministry encourages teachers of English to promote students' communicative competence and autonomy. As a teacher educator at a Japanese university, I have implemented various teacher education programs in my classes in order to develop initial and in-service teachers' professional competence and autonomy. The purpose of this paper was to consider the potential of the integration of autonomy, reflection, and collaboration in pre- and in-service teacher education. I proposed an argument for autonomous, reflective, and collaborative approaches as a necessary condition, and illustrated this with some examples of my instruction while making use of the interaction among these three approaches. We need to develop effective teacher education programs which can help individual teachers to promote their continuing professional development, and to foster collegiality and mutual respect in their educational settings.

今日、日本の文部科学省は、英語指導者が学習者のコミュニケーション能力とオートノミーを育成することを奨励している。筆者は、大学で英語科教員養成に携わる立場から、教職志望生と現職教員の専門的資質能力、オートノミーの向上を図るために、多様な教師教育プログラムを実施してきた。本

研究は、教師教育において「オートノミー」「リフレクション」「コラボレーション」の３つのコンセプトの統合がもたらす教育的潜在力を探ることをねらいとした。自律的、省察的、協働的アプローチの特徴を説いた後に筆者自身の実践例を紹介しながら、３つのアプローチ間のインターラクションが相乗効果をもたらすことを示唆した。各教育機関において、指導者同士が同僚性、信頼性を高め、プロフェッショナルとして成長し合えるように、効果的な教師教育による支援が必要とされる

Introduction

Recent directives from the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) encourage Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) to develop their students' communicative competence and autonomy (MEXT, 2003). Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are two sides of the same coin. Autonomous teacher-learners are likely to develop their students' autonomy. As a teacher educator at a Japanese university, I have helped pre- and in-service EFL teachers to develop their professional competence and autonomy through EFL instruction and to promote their critical reflection and collaborative action research in their educational settings.

In this paper, I aim to outline effective approaches to pre- and in-service EFL teacher education, taking into consideration the integration of the three concepts of *autonomy*, *reflection*, and *collaboration*. I propose an argument for autonomous, reflective, and collaborative approaches as a necessary condition, and illustrate this with some examples of my teaching practice, where I make use of the interaction among these three approaches. I put autonomous approaches first in this paper as I consider developing autonomy to be one of the major goals of ELT. I regard reflection and collaboration as strategies for developing

autonomy. Finally, I emphasize the integration of autonomy, reflection, and collaboration as such integration is necessary if professional competence and autonomy are to be promoted.

Autonomous approaches to EFL teacher education

Learner autonomy was a major concern of Council of Europe working groups in the 1980s and earlier (Morrow, 2004). The case for learner autonomy had a strong political dimension, but since then it has become a widely accepted and promoted pedagogic principle. In the *Common European Framework* (Council of Europe, 2001), one of the major aims of language learning is the idea that language study offers opportunities to acquire independence and autonomy as learners (Morrow, 2004). Since Holec (1981) introduced the term *autonomy* to the field of second language pedagogy, definitions of learner autonomy have varied (Benson & Voller, 1997; Dickinson, 1996; Little, 1996; Little & Dam, 1998; Littlewood, 1999; Sinclair, 2000; Wenden, 1991). When attempting to promote autonomy in EFL learning and teaching in Japan, I think of Sinclair's (2000, pp. 7-13) definition as one of the most comprehensive ones. Her 13 aspects of learner autonomy are: a) autonomy is a construct of capacity; b) autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learners to take responsibility for their own learning; c) the capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate; d) complete autonomy is an idealistic goal; e) there are degrees of autonomy; f) the degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable; g) autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent; h) developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process, i.e., conscious reflection and decision making; i) promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies; j) autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom; k) autonomy has a social as well as individual dimension; l) the promotion of learner autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension; and m)

autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures. In this paper, I deal with these aspects synthetically and emphasize the integration of autonomy, reflection, and collaboration.

MEXT (2003) expects each educational institution to conduct its activities by emphasizing the importance of motivating students to learn autonomously and helping them to develop abilities a) to learn how to learn, b) to discover and solve problems, and c) to act independently through positive interdependence in response to social changes. Autonomous learning is the means as well as the aim for the development of learner autonomy. Setting up an autonomous learning environment puts certain demands on teachers as well as students. Autonomous learning may be described as what takes place in situations in which the teacher provides a learning environment where the learners are given the possibility consciously to be involved in their own learning. Evaluating autonomous learning may include an evaluation of the process as well as the outcome and involve various types of evaluation, such as teacher observation, learner self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and portfolio evaluation.

Learner autonomy, which is emphasized in education reform in Japan, seems to have a social as well as individual dimension. MEXT guidelines (2003) encourage EFL teachers to implement Communicative Language Teaching, which originally includes collaboration/cooperation in learning, and the development of autonomous and reflective learning habits. Little (2000) suggests that the growth of learner independence is supported by learner interdependence. I am inclined to suppose that the strong attachment of Japanese culture to their in-groups and the importance that they attach to mutual support might provide ideal interpersonal environment for the development of autonomy. Thus, I emphasize this social aspect of autonomy in Japan traditionally known as a group-oriented society, although it seems to be rather difficult to promote interdependence in ELT in Japan.

Regarding teacher autonomy, Little (1995, p. 179) states that

genuinely successful teachers "have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers." In line with Little (1995), McGrath (2000) suggests that teacher autonomy may be viewed from two different but related perspectives: teacher autonomy as self-directed professional development and teacher autonomy as freedom from control by others. In Japan, teacher autonomy as self-directed professional development has not been emphasized in pre-and in-service teacher education. As McGrath suggests, in our enthusiasm for this perspective on autonomy, pre- and in-service teachers need to be aware that it requires of teachers a certain level of preparedness—attitudinal and technical, and that it requires efforts and ways of thinking that have not been emphasized in previous educational contexts.

In addition, McGrath (2000) implies that constraints on teacher autonomy can be broadly categorized under the macro (decisions taken outside the institution, over which teachers will normally have no control) and the micro (institution-internal decisions, which the teacher should be in a position to influence). Many Japanese and non-Japanese teachers of English in Japan are worried about these constraints. Some of these teachers do not take the kinds of independent action that they associate with autonomy, but there are those who have demonstrated the capacity and freedom for self-direction. As I have experienced in my autonomous, reflective, and collaborative approach to teaching practice in pre-service teacher education (Kojima, 2008), the more collaborative, or collegial, groups of teachers are, the more autonomous learning and teaching may occur in their classes.

Examples of autonomous approaches

In relation to the development of learner autonomy, I give some examples here of learner strategy training that I implement in my pre-

service teacher education. In my investigations into individual trainees' learning styles and strategies, most of them claimed that they did not know how to learn English effectively. Oxford (1990) introduces various sorts of learning strategies (e.g., memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, social strategies). In order to focus on learner autonomy, I emphasize the significance of developing the trainees' metacognitive strategies that involve thinking about the mental processes used in the learning process, monitoring learning while it is taking place, and evaluating learning after it has occurred. The more trainees know about their own learning, the more autonomous they will become. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, I regard reflection and collaboration as learning strategies to develop learner and teacher autonomy.

Portfolios have been shown to have various advantages, such as the agreement between instruction and assessment; the promotion of learners'/teachers' reflection, self-evaluation, and documentation on their learning/teaching; and the development of learner/teacher autonomy (Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997). I encourage my pre-service teachers to develop working portfolios that contain lesson plans, classroom procedures and management plans, student work, worksheets, observation notes, discussion notes, and reflective journals. The working portfolio is selected later for a more permanent "assessment portfolio." The teacher trainees are expected to become more autonomous by working on the portfolio. The portfolio would contain evidence related to self-directed teaching and reflections that outlines the teacher's knowledge, abilities, and beliefs (Bullock & Hawk, 2005). Reflection, which is seen as a significant skill for professionals, is the key component in portfolio development.

Reflective approaches to EFL teacher education

In the trainee-centered classroom, teaching and learning are inextricably and elaborately linked. The assumption that the aim of

teacher education is to develop trainees' professional competence and autonomy leads to an argument for a reflective and inquiring approach as a necessary condition. Reflective learning could perhaps help teacher trainees to develop their metacognitive abilities and autonomy in ELT through the reflective processes of self-awareness, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and group processing. Reflection requires trainees to think about what they are doing, why they are doing it, what the outcomes are, and how the information can be used for their development. Reflection is not just about self-improvement and self-development but also about understanding and questioning the contexts in which teaching and learning take place.

One of the fundamental purposes of reflective teaching is to improve the quality of teaching in educational contexts. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 451) define reflective practice as follows:

> an approach to teaching and to teacher education which is based on the assumption that teachers can improve their understanding of teaching and the quality of their own teaching by reflecting critically on their teaching experiences. In teacher education programmes, activities which seek to develop a reflective approach to teaching aim to develop the skills of considering the teaching process thoughtfully, analytically and objectively, as a way of improving classroom practices.

In line with my emphasis on autonomy, reflection, and collaboration in this paper, Zeichner and Liston (1996) highlight the social aspects of reflective teaching: social conditions and contexts of schooling that impinge on teacher's practice within the classroom and social interactions where teachers collaboratively support and nourish each other's growth. Zeichner and Liston (p. 6) suggest that reflective teaching emphasizes the following five key features. A reflective teacher: a)examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of

classroom practice; b) is aware of and questions the assumptions and values that he or she brings to teaching; c) is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches; d) takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts; and e) takes responsibility for his or her own professional development. These are thought to be integral features of what it means to be a reflective teacher.

Examples of reflective approaches

In order to help my trainees to reflect on their learning/teaching experience continuously, I often use reflective journals. The reflective journal that I encourage each trainee to write in my program is an alternative to field-notes. It contains more subjective and personal reflections and interpretations than the relatively formalized recordings of notes. I expect that personal reflective writing may help my trainees to develop their critical thinking, to understand themselves, and to make sense of their learning/teaching.

With regard to reflective teaching, I usually attempt to improve my own instruction through action research (Kojima, 2005; 2008), and encourage in-service EFL teachers to carry out action research projects in order to promote continuing professional development and innovation in ELT (Yoshikawa, 2005). Action research has gradually become known to Japanese teachers by name, but few of them tend to recognize the advantages/disadvantages of action research in language education through their own research experience. Action research is part of a broader movement in education associated with the concepts of "reflective practice" and "the teacher as researcher" (Schön, 1983; 1987). It typically involves four broad phases, which form a continuing cycle or spiral of research: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). It is done by systematically collecting data on our everyday practice and analyzing it to come to some decisions about what our future practice should be. Criticisms of action

research have generally focused on questions relating to its rigour and its recognizability as a valid research methodology (Hodgkinson, 1957; Winter, 1982). In contrast, the broad scope and flexibility of action research mean that its application to the field of language teaching is potentially numerous. Multiples in data collection or triangulation might stimulate complexity and subtlety of insight and overcome any problems of bias (Kojima, 2005; 2008; Yoshikawa, 2005).

Collaborative approaches to EFL teacher education

In order to improve the present EFL education in schools, I need to consider teacher education in the wider context of school culture. Japanese school culture is likely to have a profound effect on Japanese teachers and their perception of their role particularly in taking forward changes that will enhance the learning experiences of their students. In designing pre- and in-service EFL teacher education programs, I have to consider the relationships between the professionals working within the context: collegiality, support, and mutual respect. Japanese teachers need help in developing new skills, new understanding, and new ways of working in the wider school context. My role is to encourage them to move into a new era of teacher professionalism, where teachers are enabled and trusted to work within their schools to create communities of practice, certainly within frameworks of accountability, but of accountability that is more focused on teaching and learning.

Littlewood (1999) distinguishes *proactive* autonomy from *reactive* autonomy. This distinction is mirrored in Flannery's distinction (as cited in Littlewood, 1999) between *collaborative* and *cooperative* learning strategies. With collaborative learning strategies (proactive autonomy), learners have a greater degree of choice and discretion about what and how they should learn. It is the students themselves who set the agenda for learning. With cooperative learning strategies (reactive autonomy), learners work independently on tasks, but it is still the teacher who sets the agenda for learning, defines what counts as relevant knowledge,

selects learning methods, and controls evaluation. In this paper, as a teacher educator, I expect my pre- and in-service teachers to develop their proactive autonomy, and implement collaborative learning and teaching in my teacher education programs.

As for collaborative learning, I regard collaboration as a social strategy to develop professional autonomy and usually pay attention to the following key elements: a) positive interdependence, b) individual accountability, c) face-to-face promotive interaction, d) social skills, and e) group processing. Although Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1991) look on these as key elements of cooperative learning, I emphasize the integration of these elements in my pre-service teacher education programs. This may lead to the trainee group's internal development and growing maturity, which go "hand in hand with the members' taking on increasing responsibility and control over their own functioning" (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, p.105).

In the Japanese classroom, both students and teachers are often resistant to collaborative approaches to EFL learning because of its novelty. Japanese students are accustomed to teaching-centered, direct instruction in which students are provided with the content that they need to know. Another major reason for apprehension is that they often do not know how to work together and are not given any help in making their groups functional. Equally important is the impact of group learning on teachers. If teachers would like to implement effective collaborative learning in their classes, they face many instructional and institutional challenges. These include a) the shift in authority from the individual instructor to shared authority with the group of learners, b) careful planning of the instructional setting such as timing and efficiency concerns, and c) assessment issues such as group versus individual grades. Taking these into consideration, I have helped my trainees to develop their autonomy through collaborative interaction among trainees, teacher educators, and school teachers. In the group-oriented society in Japan, collaborative EFL learning has great

potential as a culture-sensitive approach to developing communicative competence and learner autonomy.

Collaborative and team approaches to teaching have been used in Japanese schools since the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program started in secondary education in 1987. Since then, team teaching between native and non-native English-speaking teachers has become more widespread in primary and secondary schools, where it is generally expected that the use of native English-speaking teachers may be able to contribute to improvements in students' listening/speaking abilities and cross-cultural understanding. Native English-speaking teachers in universities tend to be expected to play their roles more autonomously and collaboratively than those in primary and secondary schools not only to develop students' communicative competence but also to contribute to university education reform. Collaborative and reflective teaching and research can be conducted by more than two teachers, including native English-speaking teachers. Collegiality of school/university staff groups is positively related to the effectiveness of the school/university and the achievement of the students (Kojima, 2008; Tomiyama, 2006). Collaborative teachers a) share common goals, professional values and norms, b) have frequent conversation about teaching and learning, c) observe and provide feedback for one another, d) work collaboratively on the curriculum, and e) teach one another about teaching, learning and leading (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). This type of collaboration will be significant in educational contexts in Japanese schools/universities, including teacher education programs (Kojima, 2005; 2008).

As Bailey (2006) suggests, one characteristic of the traditional prescriptive approach to teacher education was the teachers' lack of autonomy, contrasted with the supervisor's extreme autonomy. I have noticed a gradual change in how we teacher educators look at teacher development and professionalism. In my trainee-centered in-service EFL teacher education programs, the supervisor is no longer seen as

the dominant source of expertise. The fundamental features of my collaborative and reflective supervision are: a) to help the teacher to develop professional competence and autonomy through practice in reflection and self-evaluation; b) to jointly engage in problem finding, problem solving, and trying new procedures, programs, and curriculums; c) to have educational expertise, view teaching as complex work, and openly discuss the work and how it was done to facilitate effective performance; d) to show respect for the teacher by employing tact and choosing the right time and place to discuss problems and to help in the corrective process; e) to engage the teacher in the process of reflective teaching practice while fostering critical inquiry into the process of teaching and learning; f) to broaden and deepen the repertoire of images and metaphors that the teacher can call on to deal with problems; g) to help the teacher to develop the skills to interpret the data collected on his/her teaching; h) to allow the teacher to play a major role in interpreting the data collected; i) to examine the standards in relation to the peculiarities of the particular setting, people and time; and j) to use and develop the expertise of the teacher to examine ideal purposes and procedures of teaching, and to refine present performance accordingly (Goldsberry, 1988; Nolan & Huber, 1989; Okeafor & Poole, 1992; Yoshikawa, 2005)

Examples of collaborative, autonomous, and reflective approaches

In order to illustrate my ideas described above, I give some examples of my autonomous, reflective, and collaborative learning (ARCL) approach and autonomous, reflective, and collaborative teaching (ARCT) approach to pre-service EFL teacher education. In my ARCL program (Kojima, 2005), I have helped my trainees to develop their communicative competence, learner autonomy, teaching knowledge and skills, which will enable them to implement their own autonomous and communicative approach to ELT in the future school classroom. In the ARCL program, the trainees are divided into small groups, where

they are asked to investigate a group research topic and to present their research results collaboratively and reflectively. This process means a gradual shift of the initiative from the trainer to each trainee. Increasing trainee-initiated independent work in small collaborative and reflective learning team may offer pedagogically effective ways of evaluating autonomous learning in pre-service teacher education. The formative/summative evaluation, based on class observation, questionnaires, discussion, and self-reflection, is very useful for me to revise the program. ARCL is the prevailing philosophy from which almost all of my planning operates in my university teaching.

My ARCT approach to student teaching (Kojima, 2008), is carried out collaboratively and reflectively by a teacher educator (me), student teachers, and a lower secondary school teacher in the attached school classroom. The experience of collaborative teaching and reflection on ELT tends to have significant effects on the development of teacher trainees' teacher-learner autonomy, sharing EFL teaching ideas, resources, and strategies, in the same classroom. Reflection on the process of team teaching may be encouraged with the practical aim in mind of developing teacher-learner autonomy through human interdependence. In order to analyze the effectiveness of the ARCT program, quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (e.g., questionnaires to survey the trainees' reactions, teacher observation, reflective journals) are used continuously during the program. I encourage each of the school student groups and the trainees to develop their working portfolios. The process of triangulation helps me to ensure that the data obtained are as reliable as possible. In order to increase the likelihood for successful ARCT, the collaborators need to recognize each other's contribution. Once the common goals have been identified, each partner accomplishes those goals as autonomously as possible. It is useful to set aside specific time for planning and team processing on a regular basis. Because collaborative reflection is an expected practice throughout the program, the trainees examine and

assess their own teaching as team members. The work at this phase of the program may serve as a precursor of collaborative action research. In order to avoid a variety of constraints resulting from differences in teaching principles between the teacher educator and the school teacher, we are in the process of developing collaborative research meetings and promoting effective communication between the faculty of education and the attached school.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have considered some features of autonomous, reflective, and collaborative approaches to EFL teacher education, and introduced some examples of my teaching practice. I have implemented the interaction among the three approaches in my pre- and in-service teacher education classes. However, not all university teachers would like to promote trainees' autonomy and staff members' collegiality. At my university, I have encountered various implementation problems resulting from the difference of teaching philosophies among us. Continuous and extensive further research will be required to fully understand the nature and quality of pre- and in-service teachers' development through autonomous, reflective, and collaborative approaches. Individual or collaborative action research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of such integrated approaches in education settings in Japan.

In order to promote teacher trainees' autonomy, it is important for us teacher educators to look at wider contexts of EFL teachers' work. Japanese school culture is likely to have a profound effect on Japanese teachers and their perception of their role particularly in taking forward changes that will enhance learner and teacher development. We have to consider the relationships between the professionals working within the context: collegiality, support, and mutual respect. Japanese teachers need help in developing new skills, new understanding, and new ways of working in the wider school

context. Our role is to encourage them to move into a new era of teacher professionalism, where teachers are enabled and trusted to work within their schools to create communities of practice, certainly within frameworks of accountability, but of accountability that is more focused on autonomous, reflective, and collaborative learning and teaching. Just as learners are learners for life, effective teachers need to engage in lifelong professional development.

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