Feature Article

Developing Initial EFL Teachers' Autonomy: The Case of the CARLA Program

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Abstract

I have employed a collaborative, autonomous, and reflective learning approach (CARLA) in initial teacher education for several years (Kojima, 2008a). This follow-up study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the CARLA program in developing initial EFL teachers' autonomy at a Japanese university. A modified version of CARLA was implemented in my English language teaching (ELT) methodology classes in 2007 and 2008. The teacher trainees were divided into small groups and each group was given a different research topic. After investigating the topic, they presented their research results collaboratively. For half-term review and summative evaluation, I administered a questionnaire to reflect on their group work. I also analyzed the trainees' group portfolios and reflections, and my observations and reflections. CARLA could be effective in promoting the trainees' autonomy, although the approach was improved in this context through action research. I emphasize the integration of collaboration, autonomy, and reflection in initial teacher education programs. Such integration may have some potential to promote teacher trainees' professional competence and autonomy.

教員養成教育で協働的・自律的・省察的アプローチ(CARLA)を数年間実践してきた立場から、本研究は、英語教員志望生のオートノミーの育成に対するCARLAプログラムの効果を追跡調査することをねらいとした。修正を施したCARLAが、2007年と2008年に英語科教育法のクラスで実施された。受講生たちは小グループで教授法に関する多様なトピックを課題として与えられ、協働による調査研究の後で成果を発表した。中間と最後に行ったグループ活動を振り返るアンケート調査、グループによるポートフォリオと省察、指導者の観察と省察から得たデータを分析した。その結果、アクション・リサーチで授業改善を図りながら、CARLAのオートノミー促進効果が認められた。教員養成における協働・自律・省察の統合は、教員志望生の専門職能とオートノミーを促進する潜在力があると見なされる。

As a teacher educator at a Japanese university, I have been helping initial teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) to develop their autonomy in language learning and teaching. In 2004, 2005, and 2006, I carried out a collaborative, autonomous, and reflective learning approach (CARLA). The results of my research (Kojima, 2008a) imply that a majority of the trainees showed positive attitudes towards the CARLA program. CARLA is my original approach to initial EFL teacher education. I regard collaboration and reflection as strategies to develop learner and teacher autonomy in pre-service education. In the 2007/2008 CARLA program, I emphasized the integration of collaboration, autonomy, and reflection more than previous CARLA training programs. Such integration may be necessary if teacher trainees' professional competence and autonomy are to be promoted.

Collaboration, which is a social affective strategy for learner autonomy, is the main strategy that I have often employed in my university teaching as a whole. I think of collaborative learning as a culture-sensitive approach to ELT in Japan, which is likely to be regarded as a collectivist society. Collaborative learning "is an excellent way to scaffold instruction because it provides instructional support while increasing student responsibility for learning" (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999, p.41). In CARLA in 2007 and

2008, I emphasized the integration of the key elements of collaborative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face interaction, social skills, and group processing (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991), and encouraged the trainees to foster their own autonomy by promoting their consciousness-raising of these elements. I expected them to be able to implement CARLA in their future teaching practice in the school classroom with more confidence.

Reflecting on the metacognitive processes of planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluating could perhaps help the trainees to develop autonomy. They work through each of these processes for any challenging learning task. 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. The assumption that the primary aim of teaching is to make student learning possible will lead to an argument for a reflective and inquiring approach as a necessary condition for improving teaching and learning.

In CARLA in 2007 and 2008, I put more stress on the importance of reflective learning, group processing, and self-reflection. As a result of my reflection on the 2007 program, in 2008 I needed to promote group processing more effectively and implemented group portfolios. I expected the trainees to be accustomed to developing portfolios because portfolios might be implemented in their teaching practice to develop their students' autonomy. In order to have an opportunity of future implementation in school classrooms, CARLA needed to be modeled for the initial teachers and experienced by them as learners. I made a special commitment to teaching both the rationale and technique of CARLA to the trainees.

In this follow-up study, I reconsider the effectiveness of CARLA in promoting 64 EFL teacher trainees' autonomous learning through the use of triangulation in research. My research question was: To what extent can CARLA be effective in developing the initial teachers' autonomy?

Method

Participants

The CARLA programs involved 64 (38 in 2007, 26 in 2008) second-year university students who attended the class of English Teaching Methodology, with low intermediate to high intermediate levels of English (e.g., TOEIC). This compulsory class for the initial teachers met for 90 minutes every week during the semester. A majority of them wanted to be EFL teachers in primary/secondary schools after graduation. Compared with the previous CARLA programs, the number of initial teachers in 2007/2008 decreased, and I worried about their personality factors and learning abilities. I encouraged them a) to appreciate the value of CARLA, b) to confront their own learning histories and resistances to CARLA, c) to experience the differences that the CARLA process would make in their own learning, and d) to study the principles guiding the application of CARLA.

Materials

In addition to using my original teaching materials on ELT methodology, the trainees collaboratively investigated EFL-related topics and made their own handouts for group presentations and microteaching. In 2008 they also developed group portfolios, and I evaluated all these materials and their group presentations. In order to analyze the effectiveness of CARLA in the 2007 and 2008 contexts, I collected quantitative and qualitative data: questionnaires to survey the group work and the trainees' summative evaluation of the CARLA experience, the trainees' group portfolios and reflections, and my class observations and reflections.

Procedure

The trainees were divided into groups of four students. Each group was given a research topic on English language teaching (ELT):

Grammar Translation Method, Oral Method, Total Physical Response, Natural Approach, Audiolingual Method, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Suggestopaedia, and Communicative Approach. After investigating the topics, the groups gave presentations and microteaching sessions about them in front of the classroom, and then led whole-class discussions, after which I gave some advice. For half-term review of CARLA, I administered a questionnaire to examine how each group was working. At the end of the program, I implemented a questionnaire for summative evaluation, and encouraged the trainees to reflect on their group work and to write their reflective comments on CARLA. When I reflected on the 2007 CARLA program, I decided to implement group portfolios in 2008 in order to help the trainees to promote regular group reviews and group processing. I encouraged them to internalize the skills and ethos of CARLA so that they could enhance group dynamics in the future school classroom.

Results and Discussion

Review of how each group is working

In order to build in time for reflection on CARLA activities and to facilitate the trainees in discussing the issues that had emerged, Questionnaire 1 (in English) was administered to review how the groups were working when the trainees appeared to have become used to group work, which I felt occurred in the fifth week of their training. Table 1 shows the percentage of trainees responding to each point, in the left-hand column the question statements, and in the right-hand column the average extent of agreement (5-point Likert scale from "5-strongly agree " to "1-strongly disagree") with each statement. This survey had a fixed-response format and the trainees were asked to individually read each item carefully and to circle the appropriate response. They then were encouraged to compare and discuss the

issues that had emerged for them when considering each item with the rest of the group. Involving the trainees in assessment led to a sense of shared responsibility for the learning in groups. My role was mainly that of a counselor/facilitator.

Table 1
Questionnaire 1: Review of How Each Group is Working, 2007/2008

Item	1	2	3	4	5	*M*
1. The climate is friendly, individuals are relaxed and all members are on task.	53/31	35/42	8/19	4/8	0/0	4.3/4.0
2. Everyone is working. Everyone has a role.	61/54	32/27	7/19	0/0	0/0	4.5/4.3
3. Everyone understands what they have to do and is clear about their responsibilities.	50/46	35/31	10/15	5/8	0/0	4.3/4.2
4. Everyone listens to each other. All ideas are given a hearing.	50/54	35/42	13/4	2/0	0/0	4.3/4.5
5. Conflict and disagreement arise. The group manages this and finds solutions. Everyone agrees to keep the decisions made.	40/50	32/31	21/15	7/4	0/0	4.0/4.3
6. People are honest. They make constructive suggestions for change. Complaints are accepted and solutions are found in the group.	45/53	24/38	21/19	10/0	0/0	4.0/4.2
7. People can share their feelings in the group.	29/31	45/38	21/23	5/8	0/0	4.0/3.9
8. The role of the leader in the group changes from week to week or alternates in any one week.	16/26	27/39	24/31	32/4	0/0	3.2/4.1
9. When action needs to be taken, all participants are clear about what the group has decided to do. Individuals understand and take responsibility for the action which they agree to take.	35/35	35/50	30/15	0/0	0/0	4.0/4.2
10. There are regular group reviews. Attention is paid to how the group is working. The group looks after itself.	24/35	50/50	13/11	13/4	0/0	3.8/4.2

Note. 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. Adapted from *Transforming learning: Individual and global change*, by S. Askew & E. Carnell, 1998. London: Cassell.

A majority of the trainees in 2007 and 2008 were not accustomed to this sort of group work and did not know how to organize CARLA

effectively. A few trainees in 2007 or 2008 claimed that they did not feel relaxed or friendly (item 1), that they were not clear about their roles and responsibilities (item 3), or open and honest (item 6), and that they could not share their feelings in the group (item 7). As for item 8, the mean score in 2007 ($M = 3.2$) was the lowest. The mean score of item 10 in 2007 ($M = 3.8$) was also lower than I had expected. I advised the trainees to make sure of the key elements of collaborative learning and the importance of group processing. In the 2008 program, I helped the trainees to promote their metacognitive awareness and group reviews through portfolios, which reminded them of how well they were achieving their goals and maintaining autonomous group work.

Summative evaluation of CARLA experience

At the end of the CARLA program, I assessed the learners in light of the program goals, and evaluated the effectiveness of CARLA in this context. Individual trainees were given the questionnaire 2 (in English), and asked to show how strongly he/she agreed or disagreed with each statement and to make some comments (in Japanese) on their CARLA experiences.

In Table 2, as for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 9 in both 2007 and 2008, over 80% of the trainees answered, "strongly agree" or "agree." Most of the trainees claimed that CARLA was beneficial (item 1), and that CARLA made their work inside and outside the classroom more autonomous, worthwhile, useful, and enjoyable (items 2, 3, 4, and 5). The group size was considered to be fine (item 6) and the content of the training in CARLA seemed to be largely appropriate (item7). CARLA could motivate most of the trainees to take more interest in ELT (item 9). In the revised 2008 program, the scores of items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10 were a little higher than those of 2007.

Table 2

Questionnaire 2: Summative Evaluation of CARLA Experiences, 2007/2008

Item	1	2	3	4	5	*M*
1. CARLA in this class was beneficial.	58/51	32/34	8/15	2/0	0/0	4.5/4.4
2. CARLA made mastering the materials more autonomous.	45/43	37/43	13/14	5/0	0/0	4.2/4.3
3. CARLA made the experience of doing out-of-class work worthwhile.	40/40	40/43	18/15	2/2	0/0	4.2/4.2
4. CARLA made the in-class group work useful.	35/35	45/54	18/11	2/0	0/0	4.1/4.2
5. CARLA made the overall experience of the course more enjoyable.	32/35	45/50	18/15	5/0	0/0	4.0/4.2
6. The size of my group was fine.	47/58	32/31	11/8	10/3	0/0	4.2/4.4
7. The training I received for working in CARLA was largely appropriate.	40/45	45/45	13/10	2/0	0/0	4.2/4.4
8. I think my teaching ability has improved through CARLA.	16/12	32/39	39/34	13/15	0/0	3.5/3.5
9. I am interested in implementing CARLA in teaching practice.	50/31	35/50	13/15	2/4	0/0	4.3/4.1
10. I want to continue learning to teach English through CARLA.	35/31	24/46	2919	12/4	0/0	3.8/4.0

Notes. 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. Adapted from "Team teaching: A case study from Japan," by P. Sturman, 1992, in D. Nunan (Ed.), *Collaborative language learning and teaching* (pp. 141-161). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In contrast, particularly in 2007, the rate of the trainees who wanted to continue learning to teach through CARLA was only 59% (N=22). This might be partly because there were more trainees that preferred individual learning to group learning, and partly because it was not easy for the trainees to work via the CARLA framework in initial teacher education. Moreover, it should be noted that the mean score of 3.5 for item 8 was the lowest in both 2007 and 2008. Originally, CARLA was an approach to autonomous learning. In order to foster the trainees' autonomous teaching abilities, I had to develop a different approach to ELT, which could be implemented in future teaching practice (Kojima, 2008b).

In addition to the above quantitative data analysis, I used two qualitative sources of information to gauge the respondents reactions

to CARLA: 1) trainee portfolios and reflections, and 2) my observations and reflections.

Teacher trainees' group portfolios

The use of portfolios has gradually increased in popularity in education worldwide. Regarding the worldwide implications of portfolios, Zubizarreta (2009) noted that

> Countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, Finland , France, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, and of course, the United States—just to name a few—are home to institutions with student portfolio programs designed to help with systematic learning-outcomes assessment plans. (p. 4)

Portfolios might 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; Mineishi, 2002).

The individual groups in 2008 were encouraged to develop working portfolios that contained their research, micro-teaching materials, discussion notes in group work, and reflective reports on CARLA. The trainees were expected to become more autonomous by working on their portfolios. This was the first time for them to do college-level portfolio work. Collaboration and reflection were key components in their portfolio development. I evaluated each group's working process and the trainees' contribution to group research, presentation, and processing. The group working portfolio was reviewed as a whole and its pieces evaluated at the end of the program. By working on the portfolios and reflecting on the quality of group work, the trainees became more collaborative, reflective, and autonomous. I could

find evidence of the trainees' strengths and weaknesses in achieving learning objectives and some information useful for designing my new approach to learning portfolios.

Teacher trainees' reflections on CARLA

The trainees' positive or negative comments on CARLA in 2007 and 2008 were summarized as follows (my translations):

Positives
- I like the teaching style that includes group work, group presentation, and discussion in the open classroom. (Trainee A, 2007)
- I have had almost no opportunities to experience CARLA as a university student. I would like to implement CARLA when I become a school teacher. (Trainee B, 2007)
- I enjoyed class discussion after each presentation. I could deepen my understanding of various topics. (Trainee C, 2007)
- I could recognize the significance of individual accountability in group work. (Trainee D, 2007)
- I would like to make use of what I learned through CARLA in the future classroom. (Trainee E, 2008)
- CARLA should be employed in other classes at our university. (Trainee F, 2008)
- I learned a variety of methods/approaches through CARLA. Each group was successful in presenting theoretical and practical aspects of each topic. (Trainee G, 2008)
- I could understand various advantages of CARLA through my own experience. (Trainee H, 2008)

Negatives
- More attention should have been paid to how the group was working. I could not promote group reviews very well. (Trainee

I, 2007)

- The climate of our group was not good because some members showed negative attitudes towards CARLA. (Trainee J, 2007)
- It was difficult for me to persuade the other members and to collaborate with them. (Trainee K, 2007)
- I could not explain how to research the topic fully because it was very unfamiliar to me. (Trainee L, 2008)
- I wonder if my group could understand the topic well and teach it to the others correctly. (Trainee M, 2008)

The trainees in 2008 showed more positive attitudes towards CARLA than those in 2007, although a few trainees said they preferred individual learning to group learning. In order to make each presentation more instructive, I required every group to carry out microteaching and to help the other trainees to understand each topic more practically. Moreover, I encouraged the trainees to alternate the role of the leader and to enhance their positive attitudes towards CARLA. A few topics (e.g., Suggestopaedia and Silent Way) were quite unfamiliar to the trainees making the research and their subsequent presentations difficult. Taking the trainees' comments into consideration, I revised the 2007 program. As a result, there was a slight reduction in negative comments in 2008.

In light of developing their autonomy, I will introduce and discuss several trainees' final comments in 2007 and 2008 (my translations). First, Trainee A learned how/what to learn through individual and collaborative learning in CARLA.

> Our group members investigated the topic individually by using the Internet or reading some references. Then, we shared our ideas about the topic with each other, and discussed how to give our group presentation, including microteaching. Through positive interdependence, I could promote autonomous

development consciously and unconsciously. (Trainee A, 2007)

Trainee A was able to promote her own learner autonomy through human interdependence. This was often the case with the other trainees who engaged in their group work very positively.

Second, Trainee B acquired a new perspective on learning and teaching.

I could enjoy learning collaboratively and take responsibility for my own learning. From now on, I would like to recognize the relationship between learner and teacher autonomy, and how to promote school students' autonomy as well as my own autonomy. (Trainee B, 2007)

In addition to promoting accountability for autonomous learning, Trainee B recognized the reciprocal relationship between learners and teachers. He felt that autonomous teachers might be able to help their students to develop learner autonomy effectively.

Third, Trainee D claimed CARLA to be an effective approach to autonomous learning.

Although our activities were not perfect, we worked on the task autonomously, collaboratively, and reflectively in CARLA, and learned much more than we had expected. I would like to promote more positive attitudes towards autonomous learning. (Trainee D, 2007)

Trainee D understood that the integration of autonomy, collaboration, and reflection would be essential to promote effective autonomous learning.

Fourth, Trainee E had to change his way of learning in collaborative

group work.

> I had to give up my passive way of thinking and to learn how to learn collaboratively. Although I understood the meaning of learner autonomy in language learning, it was very difficult for me to collaborate with the other group members. (Trainee E, 2008)

Individual trainees have different learning styles. Trainee E experienced CARLA for the first time. It will take him more time to be able to recognize the pedagogical meaning of CARLA.

Fifth, CARLA enhanced Trainee H's self-awareness of learning styles and strategies.

> I applied a variety of learning strategies to my language learning. This experience would be very useful to develop students' autonomy as an EFL teacher. I could reflect on my group work by developing our group portfolio. (Trainee H, 2008)

Trainee H promoted her consciousness-raising of learning styles and strategies. Through strategy training in CARLA, she recognized that a portfolio could be a teaching strategy to promote reflective learning and to develop learner autonomy.

Sixth, CARLA gave Trainee N an important opportunity to promote her cognition of leaner autonomy.

> Our group members did not have individual accountability in CARLA, and I found it difficult to carry out CARLA among Japanese students with less autonomy. However, in this class I could understand some aspects of good language learners and improve my learning skills. I recognized the importance of developing autonomy for the first time. (Trainee N, 2008)

Although she was not satisfied with her group work, Trainee N understood some characteristics of good language learners and improved her learning skills.

Last, Trainee O would like to facilitate her students' autonomy through positive interdependence.

> I was expected to take responsibility for my own learning. I enjoyed learning autonomously through collaborative and reflective group work. I was very often involved in the process of decision-making and group processing. I would like to be a teacher who can help students to cooperate with each other in the classroom. (Trainee O, 2008)

Trainee O, who was involved in the decision-making and group processing, enjoyed CARLA and promoted her professional consciousness-raising as well as learner autonomy.

Teacher educator's observations and reflections

A majority of the trainees experienced CARLA for the first time, and they were worried about such a learning-centered approach, partly because they did not know how to organize the group work collaboratively and reflectively, and partly because they felt that they did not have the skills to present and microteach collaboratively. Based on the Japanese education system, I assume that they mostly had prior courses in which a teacher-centered approach to instruction was implemented. Thus, it was difficult for them to work out the necessary strategies to fulfill their CARLA task autonomously. Moreover, as for almost all the group topics, they lacked their background knowledge.

Despite the difficulties described above, however, a majority of the trainees were able to plan in groups, collaborate on research, prepare

handouts, make presentations and discuss topics in an open classroom forum all while managing to complete the CARLA tasks. The success of each group's presentation was measured by the positive responses and feedback from the other groups. The trainees voluntarily exchanged their opinions or ideas about EFL learning and teaching in the open classroom. Becoming more knowledgeable on a topic noticeably increased each trainee's self-esteem. The trainees seemed to recognize the importance of positive interdependence for learner autonomy.

Through my reflection on CARLA in 2007, I revised the program, and CARLA became more effective in 2008. For the 2008 CARLA program to be more productive, I encouraged each group to often make sure that all group members a) understood the philosophy of CARLA; b) took part in the task actively; and c) contributed equally to the success of their group. It would be necessary for the trainees to learn how to engage in the meaningful group discussion and investigation, and how to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

The trainees were expected to recognize the importance of developing learner autonomy in EFL education. Through CARLA they promoted self-awareness, took notice of their learning style tendencies, took interest in employing effective strategies in their group learning, and understood the importance of the integration of autonomy, collaboration, and reflection. Not all the trainee groups were successful in CARLA, but a majority of them managed to promote their collaborative group work. They showed positive attitudes towards developing not only their own autonomy in the university classroom but also school students' autonomy in their future teaching practice. The early part of initial teacher training is the most important in establishing a trainee's motivation and desire to effectively use CARLA in future school classrooms.

Conclusion and Implications

This study has attempted to examine the effectiveness of CARLA in developing the initial teachers' autonomy in one Japanese EFL context. My research question was: To what extent can CARLA is effective in developing the initial trainees' autonomy? I thought of collaboration and reflection as learning strategies for learner autonomy. My expectation was that the social-interactive, reflective processes that characterized CARLA would be useful to develop the trainees' autonomy (Little, 2000). Not all the trainees promoted their autonomy, but a majority of them raised their consciousness of autonomous learning and made efforts to foster their autonomy in collaborative and reflective learning processes.

Through my CARLA practice in 2007 and 2008, I observed that CARLA provided a means of working towards a more self-directed, autonomous learning environment for trainees. In order to provide a rationale for using CARLA in initial EFL teacher education, I need to improve my approach through action research, to develop the trainees' metacognitive skills for planning, observation, reflection, and evaluation, and to implement more effective learning portfolios to enhance collaborative, autonomous, and reflective group work.

For further research, issues concerning the use of triangulation in research must be reconsidered so that trainees can overcome problems of bias, reliability, and validity. In addition, I need to develop a new approach to initial teacher education where the reciprocal relationship between learner and teacher autonomy can be promoted more effectively (Kojima, 2008b; Sinclair, 2000).

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