Sheffield Hallam University

Introduction. Special Issue Featuring Papers From the AILA Congress: Research Network on Learner Autonomy Symposium, Rio de Janeiro, July, 2017

MYNARD, Jo, MIDEROS, Diego and O'LEARY, Christine (Eds)

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

http://shura.shu.ac.uk/22862/

Published version

Copyright and re-use policy

Introduction: Special Issue Featuring Papers From the AILA Congress: Research Network on Learner Autonomy Symposium, Rio de Janeiro, July, 2017

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan
Diego Mideros, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago
Christine O'Leary, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

Corresponding author: editor@sisaljournal.org

To cite this article

To link to this article

Scroll down for article.

Volume 9, Number 3, September 2018

Special Issue Featuring Papers From the AILA Congress: Research Network on Learner Autonomy Symposium, Rio de Janeiro, July, 2017

Edited by Jo Mynard, Diego Mideros and Christine O'Leary

Contents

Introduction to the Special Issue

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Diego Mideros, The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago

Christine O'Leary, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

The most recent *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée* (or International Association of Applied Linguistics / AILA) Congress took place in July, 2017 in Rio de Janeiro. As part of the congress the Research Network on Learner Autonomy (ReNLA) held a symposium entitled "Learner autonomy in today's developed and developing world" on July 25th, 2017. The AILA ReNLA focuses on learner autonomy in foreign/second language learning and teaching. It also includes a variety of sub-topics such as learner development, learner identity and agency, self-access and advising, learning beyond the classroom, e-learning and teacher autonomy. With about 500 members from all around the world, RenLA facilitates networking for academics and research students in the field.

The symposium featured researchers from various parts of the world with a deep interest in researching and promoting autonomy in language learning. The effort of bringing together research from both developed and developing contexts was indeed fruitful both from a research and practice development perspective. Researchers working in countries such as Brazil (the hosting country), Denmark, Japan, Germany, México, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom came together to discuss their research experiences and research findings in a collegial and welcoming community of believers and supporters of learner autonomy in foreign/second language learning.

This special issue contains papers with theoretical discussions, presentations of research, pedagogical applications, or a combination of all of these. They have been organised alphabetically by surname.

The first paper by **Michael Carroll** (Momoyama Gakuin University, Japan) examines the potential benefits of using an Actor Network Theory approach to describing university curricula as complex processes, leading to a better understanding of curriculum change and what might impact on its success or failure. Through an illustrative case study of a curriculum change process and its outcomes within a university language centre, he describes how human 'actors' interact with each other, and with aspects of their environment considered to also have agentive roles, to form the networks which characterise the curricula and curriculum change.

Leni Dam (Formerly, University College, Copenhagen and Northern Zealand, Denmark) explores ways in which learners can be systematically supported in becoming researchers of their own language learning within an autonomy classroom. She notes parallels with work/research cycles designed to support the language learning process and the development of researchers. The paper contains some illustrative examples that show how someone developing their research skills are also developing their autonomy at the same time.

Next, **Diana Feick** from the University of Auckland, New Zealand explores social autonomy with learners of German as a foreign language (GFL). While taking part in a mobile video project, the author investigated different dimensions of group interaction and participation. In her study, Feick argues that group autonomy is not merely the sum of learners' individual or personal autonomies. Instead, the study soundly demonstrates that group autonomy is a process of negotiation and decision-making where group members participate cooperatively and interact collaboratively in what the author calls a convergent discourse mode.

Christian Ludwig (University of Education Karlsruhe, Germany) describes a small-scale study conducted in a German secondary English as a foreign language classroom. The study aimed to explore the impact of adopting a mobile vocabulary learning app on vocabulary performance and on the development of autonomy. Although there was an unexpectedly limited use of the app, the research highlights some important factors and potential issues that may occur when designing, implementing and utilising a mobile app for language learners.

Diego Mideros (University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago) illustrates how phenomenological research can be applied to explore autonomy from sociocultural perspectives. The author makes a strong case for phenomenological research as a valuable research methodology that is helpful in uncovering attitudes related to learner autonomy through studying participants' lived experiences with regards to their own language learning. In this case, learners of Spanish who were particularly influenced by a heavily exam-focussed approach to teaching.

Christine O'Leary (Sheffield Hallam University, UK) explores the multidimensional nature of current conceptualisations of learner autonomy while considering ontological and epistemological challenges. This paper presents the advantages and challenges to exploring the development/practice of learner autonomy from postmodernist and social constructivist perspectives. In order to highlight the application of this approach, a

study involving the development of advanced foreign language learners and their teacher as a learner practitioner-researcher in a UK higher education context is described. The paper concludes with a discussion of some recommendations and limitations of this research approach.

Terezinha Maria Sprenger and **Rosinda de Castro Guerra Ramos** (Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Brazil) describe the experience of piloting the creation of a social learning space run by pre-service English language teachers in São Paulo, Brazil. Their project exemplifies and reinforces the importance of the social dimension of learner autonomy and how through interdependence and peer collaboration, learner autonomy can be promoted. The authors' preliminary findings illustrate how, despite financial and funding constraints, they managed to promote learner autonomy and oral production/practice among pre-service English teachers who volunteered to run a few informal workshops in a social learning space.

Finally, **Maria Giovanna Tassinari** (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany) focuses on the structures and processes which have been developed to make a university Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) an autonomy-fostering environment for both student assistants, as paid employees of the Centre, and student users. She explores, in particular, the student assistants' perceptions of autonomy, their perspectives on their work in the SALC. and suggestions for further development of the Centre. She concludes with a reflection on how a SALC with student assistants could be best managed to balance the need for structure and control with space for individual initiatives and autonomy.

Acknowledgements

Notes on the Editors

Jo Mynard is a Professor in the English Department, Director of the Self-Access Learning Center, and Director of the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, Japan. She holds an M.Phil in Applied Linguistics (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland) and an Ed.D. in TEFL (University of Exeter, UK). Her research interests include learner autonomy, self-access learning, advising in

language learning, and affective factors in learning. She is the founding editor of SiSAL Journal.

Diego Mideros is a lecturer in Spanish at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago. He holds a PhD in Linguistics awarded by the same university. His research interests include autonomy and agency in language learning, phenomenological research and qualitative approaches in language learning, identity and sociocultural research. He is one of the conveners of the AILA Research Network on Learner Autonomy for the period 2018-2020.

Christine O'Leary is a Principal Lecturer in Languages at Sheffield Hallam University, in Sheffield (UK) where she currently heads the Languages and Cultures subject area. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics focusing on the Development of Autonomy from the University of Sheffield (UK). Her research interests include learner autonomy, the development of metacognition and meta-affect, Higher Education pedagogy, assessment for and as learning and research methodologies, particularly postmodernist and social constructivist approaches.