

PREFACE

FROM AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING TO AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

This volume originated from Phil Benson's visit to Brazil in 2007 and the discussions he conducted with two groups of Brazilian researchers at the Federal University of Minas Gerais – UFMG and the Catholic University of São Paulo – PUC-SP.

The volume starts with Benson and Huang's critical account of how the focal interest on autonomy in foreign language learning has developed and changed and is now linked to autonomy in foreign language teaching. Three major phases in the development of conceptions of teacher autonomy are reviewed, involving attention to teacher roles in autonomous learning projects, professional development and professional freedom. An alternative conception based on the notion of transition from learner autonomy to teacher autonomy in learning-teaching careers is proposed.

Paiva and Braga follow with a discussion about the complex nature of autonomy, drawing on Complexity Theory. Their assumptions are corroborated by data from a corpus of 80 English language learning narratives.

In the next two chapters the researchers examine different aspects related to learner and teacher autonomy within the context of undergraduate courses in Modern Languages where most of the students are expected to become teachers of English.

Based on the assumption that what students do on their own, outside the classroom, constitutes a relevant aspect of successful language learning, Magno e Silva presents her proposal for the enhancement of autonomy. The proposal encompasses aspects such as difficulties faced in the process of language learning, learning styles, the use of technological tools to improve learning autonomy, the development of language learning

strategies and the implementation of self-monitoring and self-evaluation routines.

Based on critical pedagogy as proposed by Paulo Freire, Nicolaidis and Fernandes argue that the social environment where learning takes place and the opportunities it generates play an important role in the development of autonomy. To illustrate their point, they present a case study involving an undergraduate language learner, considered a rebel by some of his teachers, and some of the transformations he went through during the learning process.

In the final chapters, aspects of learner and teacher autonomy are dealt with in the context of in-service teacher development programs.

Mello, Dutra and Jorge are concerned with the role of collaborative action research in the development of teacher autonomy. In their paper, they present the features of the one-year program they developed with teacher students, some of the insights they had and the results of their investigation.

Within the context of an online in-service teacher development course, Collins analyses forum messages and identifies possible evidences of autonomy development. Drawing on literature in the areas of distance learning (Garrison et al. 2003), autonomy development (Benson 2001) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Martin & Rose 2003) and based on her findings, she discusses possible connections between online distance learning, autonomy development and the use of language.

Still in the context of online in-service teacher development programs, Sprenger and Wadt describe the process of updating a course syllabus originally designed to foster the development of teacher autonomy. They take into account the participants' reactions and evaluations concerning the first version of the course, the new context, and the developments in the literature related to learner and teacher autonomy. Concerning this last point, it is important to mention the relevance given to learner and teacher narratives and their connections with the development of teacher autonomy.

The final paper presents part of the research conducted by Sprenger (2004) and shows ways to observe the process of teacher autonomy development. Drawing on activity theory (Leontiev 1978; Engeström 1987, 1999), she focuses on the contradictions within the most frequent conversation topics and their process of transformation. Her data include forum messages, chat logs and email messages as well as reflective journals and didactic materials produced by the student teachers.

This collection, by researchers from seven different universities, offers the reader a wide and interesting scope of themes related to learning, teaching and autonomy development. We enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the papers and we now welcome the important and invaluable opportunity to publish them. We hope the reader perceives them as a good contribution to his/her own reflections on autonomy development in learning and teaching.

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September 2008