Report on activities of the AILA Research Network on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning, 2008-2011

Prepared by Garold Murray and Richard Smith, Joint Convenors, 2008-11

Scope and Aim of the ReN

The ReN on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning is a multinational community of around 400 researchers from over 40 countries dedicated to the advancement of the understanding of the role of learner autonomy in language learning. The ReN on Learner Autonomy aims to promote research and disseminate findings on 1) the nature of learner autonomy, 2) the conditions under which learner autonomy develops in individuals, and 3) the processes by which teachers or advisers might encourage or enhance learner autonomy in specific learning contexts. In accordance with these aims, the ReN seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

- to maintain a data-base of its members and the research projects undertaken by them and other researchers;
- to maintain a website and a bibliography of material related to learner autonomy;
- to prepare an annual newsletter; and
- to hold forums at the World Congress of AILA and at other appropriate times in which research is presented and discussed.

ReN Activities 2008-2011

In fulfillment of its objectives and the AILA guidelines governing ReNs, the ReN on Learner Autonomy has engaged in the following activities over the past three years:

Election of Convenors

Following the AILA World Congress 2008 in Essen, Germany, the ReN held properly constituted elections organized by one of the 2002-2005 convenors (Richard Pemberton) which enabled members to nominate and vote online for two 2008-11 convenors. As a result, Garold Murray (Okayama University, Japan) was re-elected to serve a second term and Richard Smith (University of Warwick, UK) was elected to replace Terry Lamb, who had completed his second term as convenor.

Report on ReN Activities 2005-2008

In accordance with AILA ReN guidelines, following the AILA 2008 Congress, the 2005-2008 convenors, Terry Lamb and Garold Murray, prepared an extensive report on the ReN's activities during the previous three years which they submitted to the AILA ReN Committee.

Proposal to Renew the ReN for 2008-2011

The 2008-2011 ReN convenors, Garold Murray and Richard Smith, with the help of outgoing convenor, Terry Lamb, prepared a lengthy proposal convincing the AILA ReN Committee to renew the Research Network status of the ReN on Learner Autonomy for another three years. The convenors have also received a verbal assurance that – on submission of a satisfactory report detailing 2008-11 activities (the current report) – this status can be extended for a further three years (2011-14).

Membership

The ReN has a membership of just over 400 (compared with around 300 in October 2008), with members coming from 50 countries (Algeria, Australia, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong SAR China, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Macau SAR China, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, UAE, UK, USA.

During the 2008–2011 term, a list of members has been compiled and made available via the website, with links to individual members' homepages when these are provided. In response to requests from members, a social networking facility has also been set up through Academia.edu to enable ReN members to communicate directly and follow the work and publications of other members.

Bulletins

During 2008-2011 the yearly ReN Newsletter was replaced by the more frequently produced ReN *Bulletin*. Over the past three years, seven Bulletins have been published on-line. These Bulletins, which informed members of ReN business, upcoming events, recent publications, etc. can be viewed on our website: http://ailarenla.org/bulletins/.

Website

In November 2009, the website was comprehensively updated. The original format was a static Web 1.0 model designed for one-way information dissemination. The updated website is more dynamic and interactive and makes use of Web 2.0 technology in many beneficial ways: (1) It can be updated by multiple editors as it is stored online, (2) a comment box feature means that readers can comment on articles and other items and authors can respond, (3) members can respond to the bulletins publicly on the website and responses can be added by the convenors or others, (4) members can subscribe to the website and receive notifications each time it is updated.

In terms of usage, the website normally receives around 40 hits per day. The number of visits to the site has gradually increased since its launch. and so far this year, it has received 7,286 hits.

Most visitors find the site by following a link in an e-mail (e.g. in convenors' messages to members announcing a new Bulletin). Others follow a link from an event website, a personal website or professional association websites. The top referrers are:
- canterbury.ac.uk (recent event in the UK) (83 visitors)
- let.osaka-u.ac.jp/~naoko/LA/autonomy.html (Prof. Aoki's website) (66 visitors)
- ilac2010.zirveuniversitesi.org (recent event in Turkey) (51 visitors)
- http://www.aila.info/networks/ren.html (AILA website) (47 visitors)
- ld-sig.org (JALT Learner Development SIG) (28 visitors)

The top search terms that visitors have used to find our pages are:

learner autonomy (487), learner autonomy in language learning (428), autonomy in language learning (176), learning autonomy (87), autonomy in learning (66), aila Beijing (64), aila 2011 (55).

Apart from the homepage, the most heavily accessed pages are:

- Publications (1,817 views)
- Pedagogy for Autonomy (*LALL* article by Manuel Jiménez Raya) (1,393 views)
- *LALL* (662 views)
- Membership (618 views)
- Call for proposals – Beijing (532 views)

LALL (*Learner Autonomy in Language Learning*)

This part of our website has been newly established for members' reports of research and/or innovation – whether in progress or completed – conference reports, book reviews, and longer articles. In relation to these types of contribution this space takes over the function previously served by the newsletter *Learner Autonomy in Language Learning*. Four online issues of *LALL* were published during 2008-11.

E-Discussion List

AUTO-L is the ReN's e-discussion list, and is open to members and non-members of the ReN alike. Over the past three years several discussions have been held, either spontaneously or facilitated by guest hosts. Most recently Andy Gao has been moderating a discussion on the social aspects of learner autonomy in order to stimulate debate leading up to the conference '*Cutting Edges – Autonomy and Community in Language Learning, Teaching and Training* at Canterbury Christ Church University in Canterbury and the ReN symposium to be held at the AILA Congress in Beijing.

ReN Supported Events

With a view to encouraging more face-to-face networking between AILA Congresses, we have instituted a new strategy of 'ReNLA support' (involving widespread publicity but no financial commitment) for certain conferences with an autonomy theme. Desirable criteria are that these should: issue an open call for papers; provide a publication opportunity; and seek to make selected presentations available online. So far we have supported two conferences in this manner, at Zirve University, Gaziantep, Turkey, 1-3 June 2010 (*Implementing Learner Autonomy in the 21st Century*) and at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK, 1-2 July 2011 (*Cutting Edges: Autonomy and Community in Language Learning, Teaching and Training*). We are also supporting the forthcoming *Independent Learning Conference 2012*, at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 30 August – 2 September 2012.

Symposium

A ReN symposium (followed by Business Meeting) has been organized for the 16th World Congress of the International Association of Applied Linguistics in Beijing and will be held on Friday, August 26, from 9:00 – 12:00 in Para Room 7. The theme of the symposium is 'Social Dimensions of Autonomy'. Following a call for proposals, abstracts were blind-reviewed. The names of the presenters and the titles of their papers,

accompanied by full abstracts, can be accessed on the ReN website:
http://ailarenla.org/events/beijing2011

Publications

Papers presented at the ReN symposium held at the AILA World Congress in Essen Germany, 2008, accompanied by papers from other ReNLA members which explore the links between identity, motivation and autonomy have been published as an edited collection:

Murray, G., Gao, X, & Lamb, T. (Eds.) (2011). *Identity, motivation, and autonomy in language learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Papers presented at the ReNLA-supported 1st International Foreign Language Teaching Conference: Independent Learning held at Zirve University, Gaziantep, Turkey, in June, 2010, have been published on-line.

Gardner, D. (Ed.) (2011). *Fostering autonomy in language learning*. Gaziantep: Zirve University. Available at http://ilac2010.zirve.edu.tr

Plans are under way to have the papers presented at ReN symposium to be held in Beijing published as an edited collection.

For details of other publications by ReN members during the period for 2008 to 2011, please visit our website: http://ailarenla.org/publications/.

GM, RS, July 2011