Abstract of PhD Thesis

Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn: A Longitudinal Study of Student Teachers' Autonomous Development

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The view that autonomy is a multidimensional construct which may change over time and space calls for more empirical studies to understand its long-term development within individuals across contexts. While the current literature often examines one particular version of autonomy at a time, the present study adopts the kaleidoscopic strategy by integrating different perspectives and embraces the overall development of multiple domains of autonomy in the same individuals over time. The principal research question investigated was, "How do student teachers develop their learner and teacher autonomy in EFL learning and teaching over time?" Data collected from semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, lesson observations, teaching practice portfolios and casual talk over a four-year period were examined employing narrative analysis and multiple modes of analysis of narratives. With the help of a newly derived multi-control model, the autonomous development of four Hong Kong student teachers dating back to their primary education, spanning their secondary and tertiary education and their overseas immersion semester in multiple settings was tracked.

The findings of this study show that although the development of the four EFL student teachers' learner and teacher autonomy seems to be highly context-specific and idiosyncratic and there was uneven and combined development in different domains of autonomy, certain shared patterns can be identified. The key common patterns of the student teachers' autonomous EFL learning are named as (1) autonomy in embryo, (2) autonomy in hibernation, (3) autonomy branching out, and (4) autonomy taking root,

whilst the shared patterns of their autonomous EFL teaching are termed as (1) autonomy on trial, (2) autonomy in retreat, (3) autonomy in bud, and (4) autonomy in blossom. This study provides evidence that while pro-autonomy teacher educators, supporting teachers on teaching practice and significant others were positive sources of other control in the changing learning and teaching contexts, there were also autonomy-thwarting environments where the student teachers' natural tendency to self-directedness was constrained. What helped them out of their predicaments was their developing resilience and reflective ability.

Based on the findings, an integrated theoretical framework for conceptualising student teachers' autonomous development over time was established, pointing to the need for a holistic understanding of the multifaceted and mutable developmental nature of both learner and teacher autonomy, and their inextricably intertwining relationship to personal autonomy. Student teachers' autonomous development was theorised as the dynamic interaction between self control on the part of the developing student teacher and other control in the changing contexts over time.

To promote autonomy in student teachers, I suggest that teacher education programmes provide them with an appropriate mix of challenge and support and vision for change at their own pace to help them succeed as autonomous learners and teachers for life.