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# An exploration of learner autonomy in an international university in Japan

Joseph Denby Sykes

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
requirements of the University of Westminster  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted for examination January 2023



In memory of Steve Sykes

# Abstract

Sociocultural perspectives on learner autonomy demand a whole-life perspective on the learner, who has agency in the construction of their identity. The full implications of this have not until now been accounted for in learner autonomy research. Central to an understanding of the *autonomy* in learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective, I argue, is the relationship between choices and values. Through participatory ethnographic inquiry that involved the iterative process of generating multimodal qualitative data and relating it to theories of learner autonomy, identity and personal autonomy, I conceive learner autonomy as: the capacity to exercise control in learning (a process of identity construction), which amounts to self-definition through self-direction on the basis of authentic values arrived at through self-reading; in relation to the affordances and constraints inherent to the embodied, sociohistorical and emplaced self. This universal construct is manifested in ways that are particular to place. In the English medium, international, liberal arts university, situated in Japan, that was the context of this inquiry, learner autonomy was manifested in students' attempts to reconcile disruptions to their identities caused by the heterogeneity of the student body, the English (foreign) language environment and opportunities for experiencing novel ways of life. The emotional responses to these disruptions prompted self-reading, which led to self-definition and often self-direction, which were afforded by opportunities for friendships (which afforded emotional support and opportunities for value-oriented dialogue), an institutional ethos of autonomy, opportunities for the development of knowledge (which facilitated the development of knowledge of oneself in relation to the world) and support for participating in communities of practice. This thesis documents the inquiry from its autobiographical and contextual origins, through its positioning in relation to learner autonomy literature, development of the theoretical framework and research methods, presentation and interpretation of data on the learning trajectories of students at the university, and discussion of its implications for the field, for practice and for the Japanese educational context.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Research under the banner of ‘learner autonomy’ is broadly agreed to have begun with Holec’s (1980) seminal report to the Council of Europe on the state of language education in Europe, in which he defined it as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” (Holec, 1980: 4). The field since then has evolved; each shift in emphasis prompted by the recognition of a shortcoming in the one before. Early research tended to focus on the technical resources required to enable independent language learning (Dickinson, 1987), but due to the recognition that mere provision of resources rarely led to successful language learning (Oxford, 2003), the emphasis shifted to the psychology of the learners and learner autonomy came to be viewed as a psychological capacity (Little, 1991). Such research, however, was criticised for universalising learners, thereby ignoring their relationship with context, and for ignoring learner autonomy’s implicit ideological underpinnings (Pennycook, 1997), leading to research from a sociocultural perspective that emphasised the role of social context and the inherently interdependent nature of language learning (Lamb, 2013; Toohey and Norton, 2003), and from a critical/political perspective that examined the ideological entailments of learner autonomy (Lamb, 2008; Pennycook, 1997). Sociocultural research on learner autonomy tends to conceive learning as identity construction (Lamb, 2013), which by default broadens the focus to the whole life of the learner, beyond the classroom and beyond language learning. Such research successfully accounts for the social nature of learning, but I argue that it does not account for the social nature of autonomy.

Through this inquiry, I came to conceive learner autonomy as: the capacity to exercise control in learning (a process of identity construction), which amounts to self-definition through self-direction (which may require either resistance or resolve) on the basis of authentic values arrived at through self-reading; in relation to the affordances and constraints inherent to the embodied, sociohistorical and

emplaced self. This conception places equal emphasis on the processes involved in exercising control as the processes involved in learning. It is a universal philosophical construct that is manifested in ways that are particular to place. The empirical focus of this inquiry is on *how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of an English medium, international liberal arts university, situated in Japan*. I found that learner autonomy was manifested in students' attempts to reconcile disruptions to their identities caused by the heterogeneity of the student body, the English (foreign) language environment and opportunities for experiencing novel ways of life. The emotional responses to these disruptions prompted self-reading, which led to self-definition and often self-direction, which were afforded by opportunities for friendships (which afforded emotional support and opportunities for value-oriented dialogue), an institutional ethos of autonomy, opportunities for the development of knowledge (which facilitated the development of knowledge of one's relationship with the world) and support for participating in 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

In this chapter, I deal with some basic issues of terminology, in section 1.2; I contextualise the study in terms of the following: my assumptions about reality and knowledge that are foundational to the research, in section 1.3; its autobiographical origins, in sections 1.4 and 1.5; the intellectual, political and educational context of Japan, in section 1.6; the context of the university, in section 1.7; and in terms of my career as a learner autonomy researcher, in section 1.8. Finally, in section 1.9, I describe the structure of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

## 1.2 Terminology

Before proceeding with contextualising the inquiry, there are some issues of terminology that must be dealt with. I generally define terminology as they arise in the thesis, but there are three terms that require explanation at the start, due to their ubiquity. Central to this theory of learner autonomy are the 'values' of individuals, which are the basis of autonomous choices and action; I define values, for the purpose of this thesis (unless clearly stated otherwise), as the principles by

which people believe they ought to live. Another concept central to this thesis is 'discourse', a term that can be understood in a number of ways, so, for the sake of clarity, I define it here. Except in the cases where I denote a specific type of discourse (such as 'public' or 'institutional discourse'), to conceptualise the levels of discourse that permeate our lives, I draw on Gee (2004: 7), who describes "language-in-use" as "(d)iscourse" with a "little d", which he distinguishes from "(D)iscourse" with a "big D": "ways of being in the world", including "ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects, symbols, tools, and technologies", in addition to language, "to recognise yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways". Finally, although I deal with the main issues of ethics in Chapter 3, there is one issue of anonymity that must be dealt with here. I was advised by the administration of the university that is the context of the inquiry to anonymise the institution. I have elected, therefore, to name it the Northern Liberal Arts University (NLAU – I imagine it pronounced 'enlau'), which reflects its true nature, while masking its identity. It should be noted that those familiar with the institution would be able to identify it from the content of this thesis but this, I argue, is unavoidable since its particular history and context matter significantly to the interpretation of the data and are to a large degree the object of the inquiry. The measures that I have taken, however, should prevent the thesis from being accessed easily in a database search and I propose that even if the institution were identified, it would pose very little risk, since the main thrust of the conclusions of the inquiry is that the institution succeeds in its educational mission.

### 1.3 The approach

Although I elaborate on the methodology of the inquiry in Chapter 3, a partial explanation of the philosophical foundations of the ethnographic approach I have taken is required, here, to justify the structure and style of the thesis from the start. As a construct that is concerned with the way an individual engages with the world, there are psychological, behavioural, social and philosophical dimensions to learner autonomy; and one cannot be understood in isolation from the others. As such, to learn about autonomy in any context, we need insights into the way these



dimensions interact in the experiences of individuals. Subjective accounts of the individuals in question are the only single source of insights into all dimensions of their experiences.

Taking a social constructivist perspective, representation by an individual of their experiences is an act of meaning making that involves interpretation, as do subsequent efforts to understand them. And, as embodied, sociohistorical, emplaced organisms, any interpretation is from the perspective of our position in the world: we construct knowledge in reference to our cumulative knowledge, which is the product of our prior situated experience (von Glasersfeld, 1984). Recognition of our sociohistorical situation, also points to the intersubjective aspects of interpretation – interpretations are, to at least some degree, a product of the community in which the interpreter is, or has been, situated (Vygotsky, 1978).

Knowledge construction, then, is a creative process of interpretation and, in the case of this inquiry, I interpret others' representations of their experiences, in relation to theoretical constructs, other research and, unavoidably, from my own subjective perspective. These representations of experiences and theoretical constructs are also the result of the creative process of interpretation. I liken this process of interpretation to the weaving of a tapestry, woven from threads that are spun by others from the fibres of their experience (of research or of life in general). That portrayed in the tapestry is reliant on the threads and what they contain, but it is shaped by me, the researcher. This analogy signifies the 'craft' involved in the research process (Smart et al., 2014) and the creative role that I, the researcher, play in representing the object of the inquiry, that the participants play in representing their experiences and the development of the theoretical constructs from which I draw. Nevertheless, I strive to foreground the voices of the participants in my representation of their experiences; fundamental to this is "self-reflexivity" (Tracy, 2010: 842), being sensitive to my own biases and motives, which I attempt to make explicit and bracket out where appropriate. My 'insider status' (Sikes and Potts, 2008) – having been on the faculty of the university for 10 years – means that I had preconceptions at the onset of the inquiry; these I make transparent in this chapter, but I attempted to put them aside when designing the methodology and interpreting

data. I also used my insider status as a resource, providing autoethnographic data to supplement that provided by the participants. In this way, I add threads spun from my own experience to the tapestry. The first step in making transparent my preconceptions, biases and motives is to detail the biographical origins of the inquiry.

## 1.4 Beginnings

The project was born in a bed of the spinal ward of a hospital, in Japan, at the beginning of 2014. I was bedridden for several months after an accident, initially having to lie flat, with nothing to do but think (I deserve no sympathy for this, it was a situation of my own making). Ruminations led to questions about my professional life. I had been living and teaching English in Japan since 2001 and from 2010 I had been teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in universities and involved in the administration of self-access language learning centres. I had co-established a small self-access centre in the first university where I worked and when I moved to NLAU, I was charged with coordinating their self-access centre, the Language Development and Intercultural Centre (LDIC). This, in addition to teaching, led to my engagement with learner autonomy research. As I lay there, I began to question the legitimacy of the practices I had been advocating for the LDIC, in the context of the university's broader mission - to foster autonomous, cosmopolitan individuals - and within Japan's broader cultural and ideological context. This account describes the starting point of this project, but the real seeds, I suspect, lie earlier in my life.

## 1.5 My educational values in the context of my biography

Born to teacher parents in the late 70s in a rural district of post-industrial Huddersfield, northern England, a progressive agenda, questioning the status quo and embracing the alternative was the norm in the household of my childhood, and autonomy was valued. I always loved learning, but school did not accommodate my desire for autonomy. Although I enjoyed the social side of school, I was rebellious with regards to study. The formal education system and I failed to engage with each

other until the latter half of my undergraduate degree. Compulsory education felt exactly that: *compulsory*. I did what was necessary to progress to the next phase, but I was not motivated to excel. This attitude to my own education combined with stories of my parents' experiences of teaching in the British education system led me often to vow never to become a teacher. It is, therefore, surprising to me that I have now been a teacher for more than twenty years. It is, perhaps, this ambivalent relationship with education that predisposed me to an interest in learner autonomy: I like learning, but I value my autonomy, and this led me to value that of my students.

The necessity of considering the context and respecting the individuality of learners became clear within months of becoming an educator, in an *Eikaiwa* (the term used to describe private English conversation schools, derived from the Japanese for English conversation, *eigo-no-kaiwa*). Although the student body was mostly ethnically homogenous, it consisted of all ages, vocations and socio-economic backgrounds, which played a role in the evident variety of motivations. This was accompanied by differences in perspectives on what constituted good teaching and learning. Such diversity was impossible to ignore, and the small class size (a maximum of four) meant that aiming to accommodate the 'average student' was meaningless. While we were expected to follow a standardised curriculum, flexibility and personalisation of lessons was the logical response to the diversity of the classroom. This experience brought to light two principles that have been fundamental to, both, my values as an educator and the research documented in this thesis. First: context matters – we need to teach the people in the room, rather than a universalised concept of learners. And second: because context matters, the individuality of the learners should guide teaching. Thus I became an advocate of learner-centred pedagogies (Nunan, 1988), which positioned learner autonomy at the centre of my educational concerns. (See Sykes (2017) for details of the *eikaiwa* industry, my experience in it and a discussion of the critical issues involved).

After working in the industry for four years, I enrolled on a master's level distance course in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. This led to two insights that reinforced my interest in learner autonomy. First, completing the assigned work

required high levels of self-discipline, motivation, study strategies and self-direction – demonstrating the value and the challenges of learner autonomy (as I conceived it at the time) from a learner’s perspective. Secondly, through my research on students’ metaphors as representations of their beliefs about learning (Sykes, 2011b, 2011d), I saw that the way they viewed their role in the learning process in relation to that of the teacher was often central to the way they approached their learning. This meant that if teachers failed to respect the beliefs of their students, their methods could be met with resistance. This reinforced my belief that considering the context and respecting the individuality of the students is central to effective teaching and that students learn more effectively if they are able to exercise autonomy in the learning process. However, if we are to take issues of context seriously, we must look beyond the limits of our classroom and consider broader societal concerns; these, after all, shape the histories of those in the classroom. As I attempt to demonstrate in the next section, the meaning and value of autonomy has long been contested in the Japanese context.

## 1.6 Issues of autonomy in Japan

The issue of the autonomy of the individual in relation to the interests of the state, and the role of education in this, has been a matter of intense debate in Japan since the beginning of the modern era, more than 150 years ago. There have been a number of positions on the issue, which can be characterised by the position they take on the ontological nature of the individual in relation to the collective, or on the nature of the ideal Japanese individual.

One thread that began to gather immediately prior to the Meiji Restoration, in 1868, was ‘individualism’, stressing the primacy of the individual over the group, which stood in stark contrast to previous Confucian thinking. The leading intellectual voice of this era, Fukuzawa Yukichi, having spent a number of years living and travelling in Europe and the USA, famously observed that “a nation’s independence stands upon the independence of the self” (Kitaoka, 2017: 4). Proponents of this view have advocated the development of a strong subjectivity (Natsume, 1975), independence

of mind (Maruyama, 1963), personal autonomy (Sakuta, 1978), in addition to more socially oriented traits, such as civic responsibility.

The dominance of the individualist position at the start of the Meiji period soon gave way to 'nationalism'. With increasing pressure from Western empires, in the 1880s, it came to be believed that Japan's survival depended on a population who identified collectively as imperial subjects who would be willing to pull together in the interests of the nation state (Anzai, 2015). In 1928, nationalistic values were inscribed into law, in the *Kokutai* (national polity), which sanctioned that actions that undermined the interests of the state were punishable by death (Blocker and Starling, 2001). This nationalistic ideology was imposed on the Japanese population, through law and education, until 1945, when Japan was defeated in World War II, and has often been blamed for enabling Japan's war-time role (Koschmann, 1981).

Another thread, which started to gather prior to the war was Marxism. The Marxist position was that of historical determinism, in which individuals are the inevitable products of their social environment, which has been contrived in such a way, by their bourgeois overlords, as to enslave them. The primary concern of Marxists, therefore, is collective action to liberate ordinary individuals, through revolution of the political and economic system. Following the release of Marxist political prisoners by the Allied Occupation and the onset of Japanese democracy, immediately after Japan's surrender, efforts were made to reconcile the historical determinist position of Marxists (Umemoto, 1974) with the non-Marxists' (such as Tanibe and Nishida of the Kyoto School) individualistic view of individuals as free, independent, rational agents, in what came to be termed the "*Shutaisei-no-Ronsō*", or subjectivity/authenticity/ self-hood/autonomy debate (Koschmann, 1981). Efforts at reconciliation ultimately failed and the Japanese Communist Party took the Marxist hard line denying the possibility of individual agency. The individualistic position prevailed but the Marxist revolutionary spirit lived on and was represented strongly within the ranks of the Japanese Teachers' Union (Anzai, 2015; Koschmann, 1981).

Recognition of the individual as a force in society led to broad concerns about the nature of Japanese individuals or the way they *should* be. Proponents of individualism, such as Maruyama (1963), defined the ideal ‘modern man’ – independent thinking and self-sufficient, yet socially responsible and connected – against which he negatively evaluated the contemporary Japanese mindset, on which he blamed Japanese fascism. This view resonated strongly with the aims of the educational reforms instituted under the guidance of the American Education Mission, during the Allied Occupation, defined in the 1947 Fundamental Law on Education (FLE) as follows:

“Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor, have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with an independent spirit, as builders of the peaceful state and society.” (MEXT 2000, 9, cited in Anzai, 2015)

Educational policy has been a source of conflict between conservatives and progressives ever since. In the 1950s and 60s, the debate was ideological, with conservatives, who dominated government, pushing for greater academic differentiation and the teaching of traditional values, and leftists and liberals, whose numbers were strong among teachers, fought against what they feared was a return to pre-war nationalism and against the increasing academic pressure suffered by the students (Cave, 2016). In the 1970s and 80s, the education system came under scrutiny due to increased juvenile delinquency, bullying, school-refusal and youth suicide, linked to severe academic pressure. Debate shifted to the kind of individual Japan needed. Progressives advocated the enhancement of the autonomy of children and the development of their unique characteristics and creativity, while economic liberals sought to produce self-sufficient individuals with a competitive spirit (Cave, 2016). Conservatives were concerned with loss of the Japanese essence, which reflected a broader public concern evident in the rise of a genre of popular literature, concerned with defining the nature of Japanese people: ‘Nihonjinron’, or theory of the Japanese. This genre has been criticised by some as being hegemonic (Befu, 2001).

The result of decades of discussion were educational reforms, in the 1990s and 2000s, that aimed at developing children's "ikigai" (power to live) (Mombushō, 1996: 12), which required individuality, creativity and autonomous thinking on the one hand, and social connectedness, empathy and cooperation on the other. The former qualities were seen to be necessary for Japan's future, but previously lacking in Japanese education and the latter were seen to be strengths of Japanese culture but were at risk because of societal change. Reforms included, among other things, reduced school hours, elective subjects and activities to foster both autonomy and social and emotional skills (Cave, 2016). However, public discourse (defined as discussion between public figures disseminated to the public through institutions, including the media and education) on educational policy and the realities of the classroom, as Cave (2016) documents, diverged significantly. With interpretation from radically different ideological perspectives (outlined above), relentless criticism from the conservative media (pointing to moral decay) and a decline in international Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings, these policies were watered down and then gave way to prime minister Abe Shinzo's "Patriotic Education" reforms in 2012, branded by some as neonationalist (Mullins, 2016).

Bringing the discussion closer to the context of the current inquiry, McVeigh (2002) documents scathing criticism of higher-education as categorically failing to achieve goals of individualisation (and academic attainment in general), which he attributes to "too much statist intervention, corporate domination and bureaucratic inertia at the local level" (McVeigh, 2002: 9). One result of this situation was that Japanese universities were not internationally viable – low levels of participation in academic conferences and publication in journals by Japanese scholars, small numbers of Japanese university students studying abroad and few international students studying at Japanese universities (Tanikawa, 2012). This was of concern to those who saw Japan's future prosperity as contingent on its participation in the global economy and led to the establishment of a new kind of institution: international universities. In recent years, NLAU has received the most attention of all such universities.

In sum, the issue of personal autonomy and its relationship with the interests of the state has been subject to much debate since Japan transitioned from a closed feudal society to an industrial nation state. The history of Japan's educational policy has been a succession of waves - the focus alternating between individuality and personal autonomy, nationalism, sociality and cultural identity - and has been a continuous source of conflict between progressive educators, conservative politicians, and business leaders desiring economic liberalism. The position of personal autonomy as a goal of education, therefore, is and always has been contested in Japan. Therefore, my own autonomy-orientated educational values are no more or less political for contrasting with Japan's current government's "patriotic" educational objective: teaching is an inherently political act, whether aligning with the status quo or not. And, in these times, NLAU, with its explicit mission of fostering personal autonomy, is radical. Details of how NLAU conceives autonomy and how it seeks to achieve its goals, in addition to contextualising this inquiry, are the focus of the next section.

## 1.7 NLAU: an autonomy-oriented university in Japan

NLAU is an explicitly autonomy-oriented university. In this section, I demonstrate this in addition to providing sufficient detail on the environment of NLAU to bring the context of the study to life. The ethnographic approach that I have taken (which I detail in Chapter 3) demands this because, while a degree of abstraction and generalisation maybe possible, the credibility of any conclusions that I draw rests on the extent to which they are grounded in the lived realities of the study's participants and the transparency of the role I play in interpreting them. Therefore, to begin, I take an autoethnographic perspective and place myself within the context of NLAU and share my view as a member of the faculty by means of the following vignette:

It is the first week of the academic year. The April sun warms me as I look across the campus. The lawn grass is still drab brown and pressed flat against the ground from the



weight of the winter snow. Dirty little icebergs sit in clear puddles; all that are left of the white walls that ran chest high along narrow paths in the winter months.

Situated, as it is, in Akita, in the north of Japan's main island, Honshu, NLAU endures prodigious snowfalls every year. Occasional birdsong and the sound of breeze through trees can be heard in lulls in the excited chatter of students. I share the deck of the College Café with tables of international exchange students who have just arrived and some of the (mostly Japanese) degree-seeking students. As I usually do, I sit and talk with my friends among the faculty – today political scientists, but other days perhaps mathematicians, a cognitive scientist, a lawyer, a psychologist, a biologist, sociologists, an economist or a philosopher, or English teachers like me – but I can hear from my seat that the exchange students are speaking mostly English, but with a variety of accents that betrays their disparate origins. They are mostly meeting for the first time, figuring out who will be their friends during their term or year here.



Figure.1.1. NLAU campus (within the red oval), taken from above, with Akita Central park behind and the airport behind that.

It is lunchtime so most of the freshman students are spending their meal plan tickets in the cafeteria round the corner from where I am sitting. They are yet to discover who their classmates will be, so they meet each other with open eagerness. I will soon address

all 180 of them, as faculty in the EAP department (“their first home at NLAU”, as the department head tells them), in the gymnasium. I and the other EAP teachers will tell them who we are and offer some words of advice to help them through the transition that they are undergoing. “Try not to compare yourself to others” is well-worn advice, a reaction to the commonly observed suffering of those who unfavourably compare their English ability to that of others. After all, although mostly Japanese, they have different histories: some have lived much of their lives abroad and others have had almost no opportunity to speak English – it is not fair to compare. As I do every spring, I will survey the students as other teachers are speaking and try to imagine who they are and why they have come to NLAU.

Was it the English medium curriculum that promises to make them fluent English speakers that brought them here? Maybe it was the promise of a good job, which is (according to the official website) 100% assured. Or, perhaps, it was the promise of spending a year in an overseas university. Was it because they wanted to (or their parents wanted them to) attend a top-ranking university, and if so, was this their first choice? It could have been because Akita is where they were born and raised, and they either did not want to or could not afford to leave the prefecture. NLAU’s rural location surrounded on three sides by forest and hills and by the prefectural sports facilities on the fourth (see figure 1.2) is attractive to some. Perhaps, for the brave, it was the bear sightings that are regularly announced in emails from the administration. Some come because they have an international history or heritage and cannot imagine thriving at a traditional Japanese university. Or did the architectural wonder that is the 24-hour library pique their interest? Experience tells me that it could be any of these. It could, on the other hand, be the university’s mission, as it is presented on the NLAU website and other promotional material.

Figure 1.1 Vignette illustrating the NLAU context from my perspective as an NLAU faculty member.

I now turn to what makes NLAU an explicitly autonomy-oriented university: the documents that describe its educational mission. As we can see in the mission statement (figure 1.3) and the educational goals (figure 1.4), the most tangible elements to NLAU’s educational approach are the English medium curriculum, its emphasis on helping students to acquire a breadth rather than a depth of knowledge

and critical thinking skills. However, I argue now that fostering the autonomy of its students underlies much of NLAU's educational mission. Besides the explicit reference to "autonomous thought" in the seventh educational goal (figure 1.4), references to autonomy related concepts pervade the mission statement (figure 1.3) the educational goals (figure 1.4) and other parts of the diploma policy, the president's message (Anonymous, 2017c), NLAU's philosophy (Anonymous, 2021a) and the description of "NLAU Spirit" (Anonymous, 2021b). Notions such as 'self-

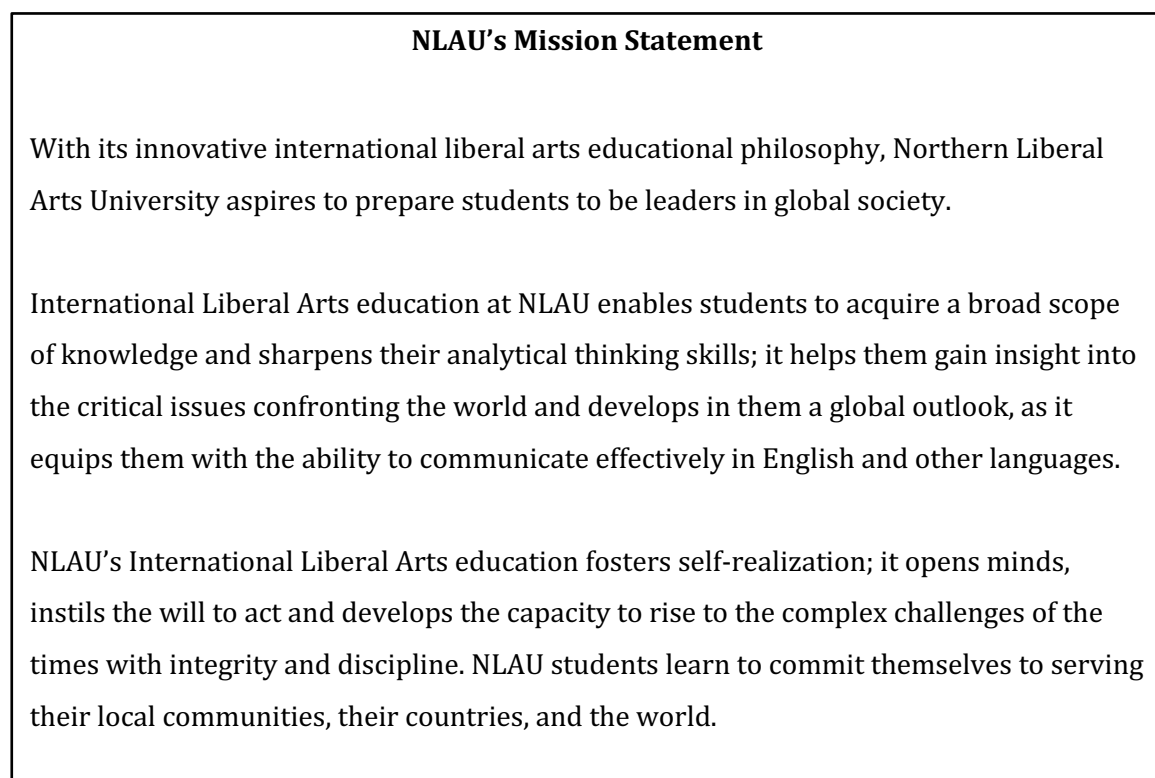


Figure 1.3. NLAU's mission statement at the time of writing, presented on the English version of the NLAU website (Anonymous, 2017b)

realisation', 'liberation from one's culture', 'independent thought' and 'self-direction and agency' arise frequently in declarations of NLAU's education goals.

The mission statement mentions self-realisation as a goal of NLAU's education in its third paragraph; the president's message places great emphasis on this and provides the following explanation:

"You may question what individuality is, who you are, and how you want to live your life. You must have plenty of questions to ask yourself, but constantly asking yourself questions, finding answers and achieving self-

realization is the very process of becoming an individual.” (Anonymous, 2017c)

From this point of view, we could also understand the third educational goal (figure 1.4), to foster a “[a] nuanced understanding of one’s own cultural and self-identity”, as a component of self-realisation; as well as linking to the next autonomy related concept: liberation from one’s culture.

### **NLAU Educational Goals**

In concrete terms, NLAU defines the following eight competencies and attitudes as its educational goals:

1. A command of English and other world languages that enables effective engagement and collaboration with people from multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds
2. A broad knowledge of world cultures, human societies and the natural world
3. A nuanced understanding of one’s own cultural and self-identity
4. A multi-dimensional appreciation of and the complex issues of our times
5. The intellectual and practical skills necessary for disciplined observation and reasoning, principled inquiry, reflection, and thoughtful action
6. The ability to integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines and resources
7. The capacity for creative, autonomous thought and the ability to make independent, informed decisions
8. A sense of personal and social responsibility that stems from and leads to active civic engagement at local and global levels.

Figure 1.4. NLAU’s educational goals as stated in their Diploma Policy as stated at the time of writing, presented on the English version of the NLAU website (Anonymous, 2017b)

The president titled his message with the radical “Free yourself from all values and reshape yourself” (Anonymous, 2017c), and goes on to stress the importance of “liberating ourselves from the values and customs that have shaped us and create our new selves” (Anonymous, 2017c) in becoming a successful member of global society. It is interesting to note the stark contrast of this approach to the founding

president, Mineo Nakajima's, belief that understanding and embracing a Japanese identity should precede the development of an international one, to the extent that he encouraged all incoming students to read Inazo Nitobe's (1906) "Bushido: The Soul of Japan", a study on the way of the samurai. Perhaps the founding presidents' approach aligns more closely with the third educational goal (figure 1.4) quoted above. It will be interesting to see how this tension plays out in the experiences of the students, as the inquiry proceeds.

We can also find, woven through the statements of purpose references to the aim of developing independence of thought, self-direction and agency (although not in these terms) and autonomy in learning. The seventh educational goal (figure 1.4) states that NLAU aims to foster in its students "[t]he capacity for creative, autonomous thought and the ability to make independent, informed decisions". This is echoed in the statement of NLAU's philosophy, which emphasises the ability to "think creatively without relying excessively on expertise" (Anonymous, 2021a). With regards to self-direction and agency, the page on the "NLAU Spirit" (Anonymous, 2021b) describes NLAU students as having "a strong sense of purpose", "a strong will to follow their own path and learn at their own initiative" and the "free will to act as well as the capacity to judge". Finally, there is explicit reference in the diploma policy to NLAU's expectation that students develop as autonomous learners (Anonymous, 2017b). All of this speaks to the local relevance of a study such as this, in addition to providing an insight into the principles that inform the framework within which NLAU students live and learn.

The practical manifestation of this educational mission is an English medium curriculum that begins with the EAP program for most students. Figure 1.5 provides an overview of the curricular flow at the time of the data generation phase of the inquiry. However, at the time of writing, NLAU was about to undergo curriculum reform, so what I describe here refers to the curriculum as it was prior to April 2021. As an additional caveat, the fieldwork was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on the international exchange program, so I do not account for this here. Finally, my descriptions are not exhaustive because details of the curriculum that are relevant to the inquiry emerge as we proceed

through the thesis. Nevertheless, for the purpose of contextualising the inquiry, I provide here an overview of the curriculum and also the facilities and services provided to support students' academic life.

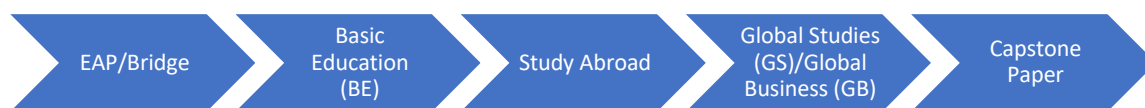


Figure 1.5. Overview of the curricular flow at the time of the data generation phase of the inquiry

As could be seen in the mission statement (figure 1.3) and educational goals (figure 1.4) above, the emphasis is on communication in English and other foreign languages, broad knowledge and critical thinking skills, rather than specialisation in a field. The emphasis on English communication skills manifests in a fully English medium curriculum (except for foreign language classes and Japanese programs for international exchange students), beginning with the EAP/Bridge program: all degree-seeking students must complete at least one semester of courses designed to prepare students for linguistic and academic demands of the university. Incoming students are streamed into four levels: EAP1, EAP2, EAP3 and Bridge. The majority of students enter directly into EAP3, the highest level (with the exception of Bridge, which is explained below), and smaller numbers require additional time in the EAP program, entering either EAP1 or EAP2. The Bridge program is for students who have significant international experience and can prove that they already have sufficient English skills to cope with the English medium academic environment.

On progressing to the Basic Education (BE) program, they continue to take mandatory English courses – advanced reading and writing programs – but the main emphasis is on entry-level content courses. This is where the curriculum is its broadest, requiring students to take courses in natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, mathematics, arts, physical education and additional foreign languages. One objective here is to qualify for Study Abroad, which involves maintaining a good Grade Point Average (GPA) in the classes, participating in a Study Abroad Seminar and applying to their selected institutions. There are 200 institutions in 50 countries and regions (Anonymous, 2017a) to choose from, but spaces are limited so there is competition for the most desirable host institutions. This period typically lasts for

two or three terms, but much longer in some cases. Students spend one year on their Study Abroad, which, as we will see, has a major impact on them. Before embarking on their Study Abroad, students must choose one of the majors, either GS or GB, and decide a focus for their Capstone paper (the graduation paper), which they will begin to read for while on their study abroad. On their return, they complete courses in their chosen major, participate in a Capstone Seminar and begin job-hunting.

To support their academic endeavours there is the library, which I mentioned above, and ALAC (Active Learning and Assessment Centre), which includes the LDIC (Language Development and Intercultural Centre), the ASC (Academic Support Centre) and the ACSC (Academic Career Support Centre). As the name suggests, ALAC's purpose is to promote 'active learning' among NLAU students. The LDIC, as I mentioned before, is NLAU's self-access centre, holding language-learning resources for the languages of all study abroad destinations. During EAP, students must spend fifty or sixty hours (depending on the level) studying independently in the LDIC, but otherwise its use is open to all students. The ASC is a peer-tutor system, where junior and senior students who have achieved good grades in a subject are paid to tutor other students. These tutors are trained in facilitating the development of learning strategies. The ACSC assists those students who intend to go to graduate school on graduating from NLAU. Incoming students are made aware of all of this during their orientation week.

With regards to accommodation, most students live on campus in university housing. There are dormitories, in which students share twin rooms. The administration tries to pair degree-seeking students with international exchange students, to promote intercultural exchange, but this is not possible in all cases, since there are more of the former than the latter. There is also suite accommodation, in which students have their own rooms in apartments that centre around shared kitchens. On campus accommodation cannot house all students, so some reside in private apartments or shared houses in the communities around the campus.

Much of the students' extracurricular life revolves around their clubs. There are clubs relating to sports, performing arts, community engagement, academic skills (such as debating or presenting), student government and global issues, such as diversity or environmental issues. Although each club must have an official supervisor from among the faculty, the clubs are entirely student run. My observation is that many students take their club activities very seriously, dedicating a lot of their time to them. These clubs tout themselves to the incoming students during the orientation week. Much of the students' extracurricular life (as well as their academic life) is, of course, spent with each other. As a result of the international exchange program and the admissions policies, the student body, while small, is diverse. The exchange program means that international students make up around a quarter of the of the undergraduate student body and multiple entrance tracks, allowing for not only academic attainment but also excellence in sports or arts, as well as provisions for local students, means that students tend to be surrounded by people who are different to them. This combined with the small population and campus size and its relative isolation means that they cannot shy away from the diversity of the student body, which, as described later, plays a significant role in the learning trajectories of the students.

This concludes the description of NLAU's mission and the framework designed to achieve it. With its explicit focus on the development of autonomy, in learning and in life, NLAU takes a stand in Japan's complex ideological landscape. However, as noted by Cave (2016) and McVeigh (2002), while public discourses and policies stating goals are one thing, the realities of students' experiences and educational outcomes can be quite another. It is through the lens of learner autonomy that I seek to examine these realities and outcomes, so the next section contextualises the study in terms of my own learner autonomy research history.

## 1.8 My learner autonomy research trajectory

In this section, I provide an overview of the trajectory of my engagement with the field of learner autonomy since 2010. I detail the concerns and questions that



propelled my own interest and the research that I conducted, as a means of contextualising the present inquiry within my professional experience. There were, broadly speaking, two phases in the evolution of my thinking about learner autonomy, which broadly mirror the evolution of the field in general, outlined in section 1.1 (albeit on a different timeframe): the first was concerned primarily with technical questions arising from my involvement in the running of self-access centres and teaching; and the second was characterised by an increasingly critical stance, resulting in a holistic view of students and their learning.

As noted earlier, the beginning of my career in universities involved, in addition to teaching EAP, co-establishing a self-access centre. My previous research on learner beliefs had predisposed me to an interest in learner autonomy so I engaged in research in this field from that point on. My primary concern at that time was with the practical business of setting up a self-access centre. I developed a theoretical framework drawing on the work of Little (1990), Littlewood (1996) and Dickenson (1995), among others, who conceive learner autonomy as a psychological capacity (see Sykes (2011a) for details). Inspired by Gardner and Miller (1999) we provided a range of learning materials. We also hired a mix of Japanese and foreign exchange students to staff the centre, reasoning that this instilled a sense of student ownership, in addition to providing opportunities for English conversation practice. Once established, my next concern was to increase the popularity and efficacy of the centre, which led to questions of what motivated students to attend the centre and how they were using it to develop their English skills. Through inquiry (Sykes, 2011c) I learned that, rather than the materials and the system, it was the sense of community that had built up around the centre staff that attracted users, and the main mode of language development was dialogue with staff, pointing to the social dimensions of learner autonomy.

Later, I moved to NLAU, where, as mentioned above, I became involved in the LDIC. However, there was a concern among faculty that EAP students, who were mandated to spend a given number of hours there per week, were not using it for its intended purpose and were rather completing homework assignments for their classes. It became clear that the reason for this was not (only) lack of motivation, but

a lack of knowledge about ways to study independently. My solution to this problem was to integrate the independent study component with the EAP classes, by means of Personal Learning Projects (PLPs), which they were guided through planning in their classes and then were expected to use the materials available in the LDIC, in their mandated time, to complete them (Sykes, 2013; Sykes and Mitsutomi, 2012).

This initiative achieved a degree of success in encouraging EAP students to use the LDIC for independent English study in the way that had been prescribed by the PLPs. However, I became concerned that this prescriptive method was at odds with my fundamental educational values (laid out in section 1.5). Specifically, I felt that it ignored the individuality of the students; it mandated a systematic way of learning to which even I did not subscribe. We were ignoring heterogeneity among the students. This, in addition to mandatory attendance to the LDIC raised the question of whether the methods that I was endorsing to promote learner autonomy were not, in fact, undermining the autonomy of the students on a more fundamental level. This prompted me to consider the relationship between learner autonomy and personal autonomy: was it reasonable, or even logically possible, to enhance a person's autonomy in the learning process while simultaneously inhibiting their autonomy in their life more generally? While engaged in the day-to-day business of coordinating the LDIC, teaching classes and raising a young family, these concerns were pushed to the back of my mind, but during my convalescence, they came to the fore. A closer reading of the literature on learner autonomy, revealed that these concerns were shared by many (Holliday, 2003; Pennycook, 1997, for instance).

From this point on, I took a more holistic view of learners: as people with histories, lives and interests beyond the language classroom. From this perspective, the relationships between learning and concepts such as motivation, identity, agency and context become impossible to ignore. Inspired by work done in the field (Paiva, 2011; Sade, 2011, 2014), I began to examine the lives of NLAU students through the lens of 'complexity theory' (Sykes, 2014a, 2014b), which then informed the development of a curriculum which sought to foster learner autonomy through engaging the identities of my students, through the use of video portfolios (Sykes, 2018). This was interesting and, I believe, beneficial to my students. Nevertheless, I

felt that I had only scratched the surface in learning about the role of autonomy in the learning lives of NLAU students. Considering the autonomy-oriented curriculum of NLAU, positioned as it is within the autonomy-ambivalent context of Japan, I believed deeper insights could reveal much about the relationship between learner autonomy, personal autonomy and sociocultural context. Thus, the nagging questions that underpinned this project from the start were: What role does the context of NLAU play in the autonomy of its students, in learning and in life? What role does the broader context of Japan play in their autonomy? What is the relationship between learner autonomy and personal autonomy? These questions were reduced to a single research question that underpinned empirical inquiry:

How is learner autonomy manifested in the context of an autonomy-oriented university in Japan?

Although this question guides the general thrust of the inquiry, more specific, 'secondary research questions' are defined at the end of the literature review, in Chapter 2, and then revised on the basis of themes that emerged through the interpretation of data described in Chapter 4, on the trajectories of inquiry group members. The revised secondary research questions are, therefore, stated at the end of Chapter 4.

## 1.9 What lies ahead

In the Literature Review, Chapter 2, I position the inquiry in relation to learner autonomy literature and begin to develop a theoretical framework for learner autonomy. In the Methodology chapter, Chapter 3, I develop participative ethnographic research methods to generate data on the learning trajectories of NLAU students and methods of analysis and interpretation. In Chapters 4 and 5, I present and interpret the data in relation to research on learner autonomy, identity and personal autonomy. In the Synthesis chapter, Chapter 6, I interpret findings from Chapters 4 and 5 to draw conclusions about how learner autonomy manifests in the context of NLAU and how this relates to the field of learner autonomy

research. Finally, in Chapter 7, the Conclusion, I discuss implications of the conclusions for the field, for practice and for the Japanese educational context.

# Chapter 2 – Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

I draw on the literature of learner autonomy throughout the thesis. In this chapter, I introduce threads that will be developed in the proceeding chapters, through synthesis with data generated by the inquiry, thereby positioning the study in the field of learner autonomy. In addition to introducing the threads, I attempt to present the theoretical point of departure of the inquiry that informed the development of the methodology (described in the next chapter). In doing so, I address, perhaps providing provisional answers to, some of the nagging questions of learner autonomy's relationship with the context of the learners (on varying levels) and with personal autonomy. Before these, however, I address the more basic question of what learner autonomy is conceived to be. Thus, section 2.2, 'What is learner autonomy?', examines the field's consensus on the nature of learner autonomy and the perspectives from which it is researched and employed; section 2.3, 'Learner autonomy in context', outlines approaches that have been taken to exploring the relationship between the autonomy of learners and their context, bringing to the fore issues of identity and agency; then section 2.4, 'Autonomy in learning and in life', examines the relationship between learner autonomy and personal autonomy; and section 2.5 'Learner autonomy as inherently political', explores critical perspectives on learner autonomy. By introducing these aspects of the field, I position this inquiry as primarily concerned with the way learner autonomy manifests in a particular place in relation to sociocultural, historical and political context. Although the present inquiry is not exclusively focused on language learning, I frequently reference literature on learner autonomy from the perspective of language learning because this was the starting point of the project (as I explained in Chapter 1) and learner autonomy is a construct that emerged from language learning research; although much of the existing research is concerned with learning generally and not exclusively about language learning.

Before commencing with the literature review, I provide a brief description of the process by which I, searched, read and utilised the literature. As indicated in section 1.8, I had been researching learner autonomy for a number of years before beginning this project, which provided a broad knowledge of the field, from which I could draw. In addition, after proposing this research topic to Terry Lamb, two years before the onset of the inquiry, I read extensively on the philosophy of personal autonomy. Then, themes that began to emerge in the data generated by the inquiry guided more focused re-reading of literature I had read previously and of additional relevant literature. Therefore, it should be noted that, while this chapter is positioned prior to the presentation and interpretation of the data in Chapters 4 and 5 (for the sake of clarity), the (re)reading of much of the literature presented here was prompted by interpretation of the data, prompting reinterpretation of the data, in the iterative process that characterises ethnographic research; and the discussion of literature (that is described in this chapter and additional literature) will continue throughout the thesis.

## 2.2 What is learner autonomy?

The origins of 'learner autonomy', as an academic and pedagogical construct, lie in language education for adults and were intensely ideological, reflecting the revolutionary spirit of 1960s Europe (Benson, 2007). As noted in section 1.1, Henri Holec (1980), in his role in the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project, is often cited as introducing the concept of learner autonomy to language education in his report to the Council of Europe. The report framed the increasing interest in learner autonomy, as the capacity "to take charge of one's learning" (Holec, 1980: 4), as a response to the ideological imperative of improving "quality of life" (Holec, 1980: 1). Echoing the liberal/individualistic position in Japan (outlined in section 1.6), he cited a perceived need to "develop the individual's freedom by developing those abilities which enable him [sic] to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he [sic] lives" (Holec, 1980: 1) and the potential of (adult) education to "become[...] an instrument for arousing an increasing sense of awareness and liberation in man [sic], and, in some cases, an instrument for

changing the environment itself. From the idea of man [sic] ‘product of his [sic] society’, one moves to the idea of man [sic] as ‘producer of society’” (Janne, 1977: 15 cited in Holec, 1980: 3). Fundamental to this was the capacity for defining the objectives and content of, selecting methods for, and monitoring and evaluating one’s own learning: learner autonomy (as it was defined in this report). This is because, if a learner can do this, “objective, universal knowledge is replaced by subjective, individual knowledge [...] the learner is no longer faced with an ‘independent’ reality that escapes him [sic], to which he [sic] cannot but give way, but with a reality which he himself [sic] constructs and dominates” (Holec, 1980: 21). This report provided a blueprint for much of the proceeding research on learner autonomy in language learning.

Since Holec’s (1980) report, there has been a wealth of research on learner autonomy in diverse contexts from divergent perspectives. Although the various perspectives on learner autonomy have led to disagreement on certain points, there is consensus on a number of its features. Sinclair (2000) provides an overview of these. Firstly, it is a construct that refers to the capacity for self-management through conscious reflection and informed decision making. It requires that we are both willing and able to take responsibility for our learning and involves both independence and interdependence. It is not an absolute construct: it is developmental and varies according to circumstance. It may develop naturally or in formal educational settings. It has psychological, social and political dimensions and manifests differently across cultures.

There have been numerous attempts to classify the perspectives from which learner autonomy has been researched (Benson, 1997; Holliday, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; O’Rourke and Schwienhorst, 2003; Oxford, 2003; Ribé, 2003). For instance, Oxford (2003) argues that learner autonomy research takes one of four perspectives. There is the *technical perspective*, from which research is concerned with institutional conditions, such as curriculum or material design, that enable autonomous learning. Research from a *psychological perspective*, tends to assume a constructivist view of learning, in which all learning is necessarily autonomous, since knowledge construction is an activity that only the learner can do. Research on

learner autonomy from a *psychological perspective*, then, tends to focus on what drives (autonomous) learning – motivation – and the cognitive and metacognitive processes involved. Both perspectives have been criticised for ignoring the context in which the learners are situated and the ideological implications of autonomy and, therefore, its applicability to other, particularly non-Western, cultural contexts (Holliday, 2003; Pennycook, 1997; Schmenk, 2005). Taking account of these issues is research from *sociocultural* and *political-critical perspectives*. It is these two latter perspectives that bear the most relevance to the focus of this inquiry, with its concern for the relationship between learner autonomy and context; I therefore address them in detail in sections 2.3 and 2.5.

## 2.3 Learner autonomy in context

My questions about learner autonomy in an immediate social context and in a broader cultural context have been addressed in a number of ways by the field. Issues relating to the transfer of autonomy-oriented teaching practices to non-Western cultural contexts, by means of English language education, led to “ongoing debate on the validity of learner autonomy in Asian settings” (Smith, 2001: 70) in the 1990s and early 2000s (Benson, 2007); and there has been a significant number of studies on learner autonomy in context from sociocultural and complex systems perspectives. These are briefly addressed in this section, with a view to being developed as we progress through the thesis.

There was concern that the application of autonomy-oriented pedagogies to non-western contexts was ethnocentric (Palfreyman, 2003). This led to debate on culturally “appropriate pedagogy” (Holliday, 1994: 1), which led some to attempt to define cultural characteristics of these non-Western contexts and develop suitable teaching approaches accordingly (Littlewood, 1999; Oxford and Anderson, 1995). Problems have been identified with this approach. Practically speaking, given the complexity of any given cultural context, such taxonomies of culture alone do not provide sufficient basis for the development of an appropriate pedagogy. Furthermore, as the capacity to take charge of one’s learning, learner autonomy does



not entail a particular teaching method and efforts to engage learner's autonomy could take many forms (Benson, 2011; Little, 1991; Smith, 2003).

A more serious problem lies with the construct of culture itself, particularly notions of ethnic or national culture. As we saw in section 1.6, efforts to describe culture can have been prescriptive and, in the learner autonomy literature, efforts to teach according to cultural taxonomies in East Asia have been described as 'orientalism' (Smith, 2003) (the exaggeration of difference between East and West fostered in the West to justify Western imperialism). Referring to the individualism-collectivism dichotomy, Ram (2002: 35) points out, "the contrast between the Western 'individual' and non-Western 'collectivity' is just one of many forms of opposition between the modern and non-modern which underlie the basis of social theory's construction of difference". Correspondingly, the efforts of learners in non-Western contexts to be autonomous could be redefined as an expression of a "Western consciousness" (Ram, 2002: 36), causing alienation. Benson et al. (2003: 23) paraphrase: "Western social theory has captured the notion of individuality for itself". They go on to point out that labelling learners 'collectivist' implies membership based on conformity or respect for authority, which denies them agency from the outset (Benson et al., 2003). The nuanced public discourse on autonomy in Japan, described in section 1.6, validates these objections, except that construction of difference is not only projected from the outside, but also underlies Japan's political landscape. The response to these issues has been to emphasise the individuality of learners: to give them a voice, in the classroom (Aoki and Smith, 1999; Pennycook, 1997; Ushioda, 2011; Van Lier, 2004) and in learner autonomy research, which we will examine next.

The need to take account of context without relying on essentialist conceptions of culture has led many to take a sociocultural approach, the primary focus of which is the fundamental role of specific social relationships in learning. Most research on learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective is grounded in the work of Marxist psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, who asserted that all learning is socially mediated. In this view, the individual, as an agent, is socially constructed: although we are biologically endowed with mental capacities, such as memory, attention,

perception and reflexes, our individuality is derived from participation in social relationships and cultural activities (Vygotsky, 1978). In terms of learning, cognitive functions can be transferred from the social to the psychological plane using socially mediated tools, such as language (Vygotsky, 1981), usually with the assistance of a more capable other, who assists the learner in moving through the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’: the gap between what they can do and what they can do only with assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). The exercise, and indeed the development, of our capacity for learner autonomy, from this perspective then, depends on social participation (Chik and Breidbach, 2011; Lamb, 2013; Murray, 2014; Sade, 2014). The centrality of the more capable other in orthodox Vygotskian theory has led to its application to pedagogical approaches to learner autonomy, from which emerged the emphasis on interdependence (Dam, 1990; Little, 1991). Such research bears only indirect relevance to the present inquiry, so I do not elaborate on this here.

A framework that is central to this inquiry, building on Vygotsky’s theory, is ‘Situated Learning Theory’ (SLT) (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a, 1998b), which takes a view of cognition as distributed among a collective that implies learning involves the interrelation of ‘practice’, ‘community’, ‘meaning’ and ‘identity’ (Wenger, 1998a). Central to this theory is the concept of ‘Communities of Practice’ (CoPs), defined as a community bound by a “joint enterprise” through “mutual engagement” producing a “shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles etc.) that members have developed over time” (Wenger, 1998b: 2). According to SLT, individuals participate in multiple, probably overlapping, (CoPs), centrally in some and peripherally in others. Participation refers not only to activities with people in our immediate context, but also engaging in the practices of broader social communities and constructing our identities in relation to them (Wenger, 1998a). As we become more competent in the practices of a community, we become increasingly central participants in it. These practices become meaningful through the ongoing reification of our participation (Wenger, 1998a). From this perspective, learning is fundamentally a matter of “identity construction” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 51–2) that results from our trajectory through the CoPs in which we participate. Thus, identity and the agency involved in identity construction constitute a sociocultural perspective on learner

autonomy as "socially oriented agency" (Toohey and Norton, 2003: 59). Resulting research focuses on the way that learners are "differentially positioned" (Toohey and Norton, 2003: 65) within their social contexts and seeks to "develop understandings of learners as both socially constructed and constrained but also as embodied, semiotic and emotional persons who identify themselves, resist identifications, and act on their social worlds" (Norton and Toohey, 2002: 123).

This holistic perspective on learners and learning has led to an expanded view of how learner autonomy may manifest in the classroom, with learners: expressing their identities (Ushioda, 2011); taking control over the classroom (d)iscourse by asking questions and raising topics (da Silva Reis, 2017); or resisting teacher's agendas, in the form of silence or disruptive behaviour (Lamb, 2013). Of more interest to the present inquiry, there is also research on identity trajectories that view learning as a life endeavour, rather than something that happens only in an educational context (Benson et al., 2003; Gu, 2014; Pitkänen-Huhta and Nikula, 2014; Toohey and Norton, 2003). For instance, Gu (2014) tracks changes in the second language identity of two Chinese learners of English in the same CoP, an English language programme, over time. The study described the way the two learners exercised their agency in constructing their identities in relation to their immediate learning community, their histories, imagined futures and broader cultural contexts. The stark contrast in the trajectories of the two learners' identities highlighted the role of individuality, which is itself socially constructed, she argues. To conceptualise identity in relation to contexts on different scales and across time, Gu (2014), drawing on Wenger (1998a), evokes three modes of belonging: 'engagement', which refers to the ways that individuals participate in their interpersonal relationships; 'imagination', which extends our engagement to realms beyond the here and now, connecting us to broader sociohistorical contexts and our own imagined futures; and 'alignment', the means by which we position ourselves within our broader social settings, beyond our CoPs, by attempting to fit into broader structures and contribute to societal enterprises (Wenger, 1998a: 173–4). I return to this theoretical framework, later in the study, to examine the role of social context, on multiple scales, in NLAU students' construction of their identities.

Another branch of learner autonomy research examines space and place as agents in sociocultural processes of learning. Central to this research - informed by principles of human geography - is the notion that places are social constructions (Cresswell, 2004; Harvey, 1996; Massey, 2005): places are spaces made meaningful through our activities and (D)iscourses (Squires et al., 1993). And by participating in the construction of places, we impose on them our identities, which are, simultaneously shaped by the places. The role we play in the construction of places, thus, has implications for learner autonomy. Some have examined the ways that learners use their autonomy to identify affordances for learning in the spaces around them, thereby transforming those spaces into places (Carter, 2017; Chik, 2017; Murray et al., 2014, 2017; White and Bown, 2017). Others have inquired into the ways that learners use their autonomy to appropriate spaces (cafes, for instance) for the purpose of language learning (Balçıklanlı, 2017). There has also been research on the way that learners use (d)iscourse to take control of classrooms (da Silva Reis, 2017; Kocatepe, 2017). Taking a more political perspective, there has been research into the ways that minority language communities exercise collective autonomy to ensure a place for their language in their geographical locale (Lamb and Vodicka, 2017). A study that shares some key similarities with the present inquiry is Carter's (2017) interpretation of the autobiographical account of the spouse of a Japanese diplomat, from the perspective of language learning, autonomy, place and identity. This learner, close to retirement age, had spent her life moving between spaces around the world. Each time she arrived in a new space, she engaged in the communities that she found there and participated in their activities. In doing so, became a part of those places and took advantage of available language learning affordances, making her a highly autonomous learner. This cosmopolitan and nomadic lifestyle, however, had complex implications for her identity: each place made her anew, yet her Japanese national identity, while at times assisting in the negotiation of new places, also placed limitations on who she was allowed to become, by other Japanese people and, because of this, herself. Although the context is very different, considering the nature of NLAU as an international place, the present inquiry also reveals much about the conflict between cosmopolitan and Japanese national identities.

In addition to these explicitly social approaches, there has been research that takes a post-humanist perspective to investigating learner autonomy in context. Such research, broadly speaking, takes a complex systems perspective, employing 'complexity theory' (Paiva, 2011; Sade, 2014), 'dynamic systems theory' (Larsen-Freeman, 2019); 'ecology' (Murray, 2011; Van Lier, 2004); and/or 'chaos theory' (Sade, 2011). This research shares with sociocultural approaches the assumption that all learning is the result of relationships, but possible agents in the learning process include non-human entities. As a framework, I consider this approach to be valuable (indeed, as stated in section 1.8, I have employed it in prior research). However, due to the tendency of such research to reify what I consider to be deeply human processes to relationships between abstract elements, and the existence of more focused and, therefore, nuanced theoretical frameworks (such as Situated Learning Theory and theories of space and place), I decided not to employ such a framework for the present inquiry. I do, nevertheless, as I explain in the next chapter, share ontological assumptions with this perspective.

By introducing the primary ways that the field has addressed learner autonomy in relation to social and cultural context, I have outlined some concepts and theoretical frameworks that can, both, inform and position the present inquiry. Literature relating to the autonomy in Asia debate reveals complexities and controversies associated with national or ethnic culture in relation to autonomy. There are strong arguments against the use of essentialist conceptions of culture to which I am sympathetic, yet, as revealed in Carter's (2017) study and the public discourse on autonomy in Japan, detailed in section 1.6, conceptions of Japanese national culture are a force in Japanese intellectual, political and educational life and inevitably play a role in the development of Japanese individuals' identities. This points to the need to take account of the different ways that culture is conceived.

While the emphasis of most sociocultural research on learner autonomy is the immediate social context, Gu (2014) evokes Wenger's (1998a) three modes of belonging – engagement, imagination and alignment - to connect the individual to their immediate communities, their broader (perhaps national) cultural context and also to their pasts and futures. This is helpful, but the need to be specific in our use

of the term 'culture' remains. Many cultural and social anthropologists (whose primary academic concern is culture) consider the term problematic - static, ahistorical, unreasonably holistic, apolitical - and prefer to avoid it altogether (Kipnis, 2011). Indeed, Cave (2016: 10) prefers the terms "common and contested [D]iscourses" and "institutionalised beliefs and practices", which seem to be sufficiently specific. An additional concern for my study is that the focus is not only experiences of students, but also the specific context in which they occurred. Although developed for a different purpose (for developing a pedagogy for autonomy), Jiménez Raya et al. (2007, 2017) use the metaphor of mapping the landscape to consider the nature of an educational context from the perspective of its amenability to fostering learner autonomy and the historical and contemporaneous forces which propel and constrain the development of learner autonomy, locally and globally. This framework was influential in my approach to examining the nature of NLAU as a place in which learner autonomy manifests in the experiences of its students.

One significant outcome of taking a sociocultural perspective is that learning must be considered to occur in all contexts, pointing to the need for a methodology that can account for all learning contexts. Another is the central position of identity in learning. Identity in the field of education is associated with post-structuralism, the work of Bourdieu and Bakhtin, in particular, which throws into doubt the possibility of a rational and unified self, which also raises questions about the validity of autonomy as a construct. These concerns, among others, will be addressed in the next section on the relationship between learner autonomy and personal autonomy.

## 2.4 Autonomy in learning and in life

Personal autonomy is, loosely speaking, the capacity to control one's life. As such, its relationship with the capacity to take control over one's learning – learner autonomy – would seem intuitively to be uncontroversial. The relationship between the two, however, has always been difficult. The learner autonomy conceived by Holec (1980) was explicitly rooted in liberalism; this conception of autonomy has

been subjected to heavy criticism from feminists, communitarians and post-modernists (Benson, 2013). Feminists considered it a masculine ideal, valuing individualism, rational mastery, and detachment from emotional commitments (Stone, 1990). Communitarians argued that it ran contrary to the sociality that was desirable of citizens (Cuypers, 1992). Post-modernists argued that no unified self exists on which to base a theory of autonomy (Poster, 2019). Such criticism resonated with many in the field of learner autonomy, resulting in a shift away from individualistic, and potentially ethnocentric, liberal conceptions of autonomy, paralleled by the shift in emphasis away from independence towards interdependence, described above. The change of emphasis in the field, I would argue, however, was more motivated by the practical concerns of language teaching and learning, than philosophical concerns: interaction is fundamental to language, meaning language learners are inevitably interdependent. As a result, few have interrogated the relationship between learner autonomy and personal autonomy. The exceptions will be considered next.

Jiménez Raya et al. (2007, 2017), point to the need to understand learner autonomy not only in reference to language learning, but also to personal autonomy, emphasising the complexities of doing so in an educational context. Speaking to such complexities, Benson (2013) illustrates the tendency of liberal educators, who seek to foster the mental, emotional and social capacities that they consider essential for personal autonomy, to take a paternalistic approach, which by definition, undermines learner autonomy. Pennycook (1997) warned of the post-colonial overtones of autonomy-oriented pedagogies unwittingly based in rationalist Kantian conceptions of autonomy. Lantolf (2013) criticises Locke's 'sovereign individual' as a basis for the possibility of learner autonomy.

It is, however, Benson (1997, 2007, 2012, 2013) who has done the most to address the philosophical relationship between personal and learner autonomy. In one instance, Benson (2013) summarises debate between those with liberal and those with feminist or communitarian positions on personal autonomy. From a liberal perspective, personal autonomy entails the absence of oppressive social constraints, the mental, emotional and social capacities, and the access to the material and social

resources that are required to author one's life (Raz, 1989; Young, 1986). Criticisms of this version of personal autonomy include: failing to account for the social origins of the self; an overemphasis on individual rights at the expense of community, interdependence and care; and the idealisation of rational self-control, leading to failure to value emotional attachments and unconditional commitments. These criticisms, however, are levelled at a misconception of the liberal version of autonomy, resulting from "'the alleged hyper-individualism' (Christman, 2004: 143) of the philosophy of autonomy" (Benson, 2013: 81), he argues. He thus considers that the main challenge for those who seek to defend the validity of (learner) autonomy is to "mount a substantive argument that autonomy *presupposes* interdependence" (Benson, 2013: 81).

Benson (2013) holds up 'relational autonomy' (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000b) as a popular basis for such an argument in the field of learner autonomy (Aoki, 1999; Jiménez Raya, 2007; Zembylas and Lamb, 2008). Relational autonomy is a feminist perspective on autonomy that, as Nedelsky (1989: 8) posits, "adequately reflects both the social and the individual nature of human beings". Benson (2013), however, rejects it on the basis that it asserts that the individual is socially constrained not only concurrently, but also historically, which he argues denies the possibility of autonomy. That we are concurrently constrained by our social context he sees as philosophically compatible with (learner) autonomy because it is possible to express agency within prevailing constraints. The notion of historical constraints, however, he argues is problematic for autonomy because it suggests the historical constitution of the self, resulting from socialisation into structurally determined identities such as gender, ethnicity or social position. This, he argues, infers "a concept of socially constituted agency that allows no scope for self-determination [which] would seem to lack substance as agency" (Benson, 2013: 82).

As an alternative to relational autonomy in reconciling interdependence with autonomy, Benson (2013) evokes the concepts of 'authenticity', 'flexible control' and 'coherence'. Drawing on Bonnet and Cuypers (2003), he conceives authenticity "in the existentialist sense of being true to a self that is already constituted in terms 'authentic concerns', or purposes, preferences and other characteristics that



individuals ‘cannot help having’ (Frankfurt, 1999: 138)” (Benson, 2013: 83).

Autonomy, from this perspective, involves taking responsibility for the expression of authentic concerns. This view alone, however, does not allow for the development of the self, leading Benson (2013) to the concept “flexible control” (Aviram and Yonah, 2004: 7), which deems autonomy to involve “experiments in living” in which one discovers their desires and talents. This occasionally requires “unconditional commitments” or “self-forgetting”, which precludes self-examination, so in this view, “the autonomous person will retain *in principle* the capacity to criticize each commitment or state of self-forgetting she enters” (Aviram and Yonah, 2004: 9). Finally, addressing the problem of the fragmented and shifting identities that result from our social constitution, Benson (2013: 84) evokes the concept of ‘coherence’ as a result of self-reflection on the “disparate elements of the self”. From this perspective, “personal autonomy is essentially a matter of coherence among all the aspects of one’s identity” (Morgan, 1996: 239).

Benson’s (2013) endorsement of these concepts seems reasonable, but I believe, as he argued had critics of the liberal perspective of autonomy, he has misrepresented relational autonomy. I argue that Benson’s critique of relational autonomy does not take full account of the heterogeneity among scholars associated with this perspective. My view, that I develop below, is that individual agency could indeed be suppressed by sociohistorical context, but we should not take a monolithic view of our social constitution. Different aspects of our sociohistorical constitution, such as the capacity for language and supportive interpersonal relationships, could enable agency in the service of self-determination, countering oppressive socialisation. These agency enabling aspects of social constitution might be lacking in some cases, but this only infers that self-determination and, by implication, autonomy is indeed constrained and enabled by social context and is not enjoyed universally.

Although Benson has contributed significantly to our understanding of the relationship between learner autonomy and personal autonomy, his analyses tend to focus on education for personal autonomy, comparing propositions from the philosophy of personal autonomy with principles of learner autonomy, without fully examining the fundamental principles of personal autonomy. It is my position that to

interrogate the relationship between the two, a more nuanced account of personal autonomy is required. I elaborate below on a more strongly social view, which assumes that learning is identity construction, in line with SLT (Lave and Wenger, 1991), that suggests that personal autonomy *entails* learner autonomy.

I begin by examining the fundamentals of autonomy. Etymologically rooted in ancient Greek, autonomy denotes self-rule and can be contrasted with ‘heteronomy’ – being ruled by another, ‘cosmonomy’ – being ruled by the universe or ‘oudenomony’ – being ruled by nothing (Sneddon, 2013). Autonomy at its most basic refers to making and acting upon our own choices, but there has been extensive debate on what renders a choice autonomous. For Kant an autonomous choice must be rational; Hume insisted that our autonomy rests on choices made on the basis of certain kinds of desires; and according to Humboldt we can only be autonomous by acting on the basis of values that we have chosen for ourselves. However, as Sneddon (2013: 43) points out, the objections each has of the others boils down to the question of “what is so special about rationality/desires/values [depending on which camp is the object of criticism]?”. He concludes that autonomy clearly involves a plurality of mental states.

A dominant group of theories in contemporary philosophy posits that autonomy of choice depends on a hierarchical arrangement of desires (see for example Christman, 1991; Dworkin, 1988; Frankfurt, 1988, 1999). At the bottom level of the hierarchy are ‘first order’ mental states. These are mental acts about non-mental things (Sneddon, 2013: 53), for example, a desire to leave my computer and take a stroll in the morning sun. Then there are ‘second order’ mental states, the object of which are first order mental states; for example, the desire not to have the desire to leave my computer. A ‘third order’ mental state is about a second order mental state, *ad infinitum*. In this view, a mental state is autonomous if it has been endorsed by a mental state above it in the hierarchy. The ‘ladder’ view, however, is vulnerable to the ‘infinite regress problem’ – if the autonomy of a mental state always rests on the one above it in the hierarchy, where does it end (Sneddon, 2013)? To reconcile this issue, Sneddon (2013), like Benson (2013), invokes the concept of ‘coherence’. He retains the distinction between first-order thoughts and those above but does not

distinguish between higher-order thoughts hierarchically. The autonomy of a higher-order thought (and choices made on the basis of them) depends on whether it is coherent with other higher order thoughts – whether they have been integrated into the network of higher order thoughts that we call the self or identity.

This accounts for the autonomy of a choice, but it cannot be considered a complete theory of personal autonomy because it ignores the historical constitution of the self (the origin of our higher-order thoughts): to what degree is the self the result of autonomous choices? For Sneddon (2013), an autonomous person must be to at least some degree ‘self-shaped’, which presupposes ‘self-knowledge’ – knowledge of the source of our motivations. We self-shape when we take direct control over our identity, which, referencing my earlier proposition that learning is identity construction, suggests that personal autonomy and learner autonomy could be considered equivalent. The difference between the two is only a matter of emphasis: skills and knowledge (or, from the perspective of SLT, practice) for learner autonomy and values for personal autonomy (which has its roots in ethics). To develop the brief definition stated in section 1.2, values are the criteria, held by individuals or by social configurations of any kind, by which things are evaluated, including but not limited to ways of behaving, manifesting in principles by which people believe they ought to live. Both learner and personal autonomy are about making choices about what kind of person to be and what kind of life to lead. When considering the autonomy of a choice or a person, though, it would seem that values must have primacy since they are the basis of our choices, a point that becomes central to this thesis. According to Sneddon’s (2013) theory of self-shaping, to be an autonomous person we must choose either: 1) first order desires in light of our values (I refer to this as ‘self-shaping type 1’ from here on in); or 2) our values themselves (‘self-shaping type 2’ from here on). It is necessary, in either case, to reflect upon our values and make them explicit (at least to ourselves), demanding self-knowledge; self-shaping involves conscious reasoning about our values. Like Sneddon (2013), I conceive the values of individuals as consisting of “a web of various levels of desires, beliefs, interests and needs” (p.168), emphasising their individual dimension. However, as Taylor (1985b) points out, self-shaping is a social process in two ways: it occurs primarily through “strong evaluation” (Taylor, 1985a)

– evaluation of our values through dialogue or introspection - and the values we hold and their alternatives are available to us only in our “horizons of significance” (Taylor, 1991: 66) the value-laden social milieu in which we live. According to this view the extent to which we can be autonomous is contingent on the degree to which we can know our selves, which are multifaceted.

Addressing the complexities of the self, Meyers (2005: 27) posits “five faces of selfhood”. These are: ‘self as unitary’; ‘self as social’; ‘self as divided’; and ‘self as embodied’. The self as unitary is manifested in our internal, subjective voice; the self-monitoring, self-controlling, rational self. The product of our socialisation and enculturation is the self as social and is the represented in our assimilation of social norms and mastery of socially accepted modes of behaviour. Self as relational refers to the “interpersonally bonded self” (p. 30) that is constituted in our close interpersonal relationships that enable us to share the joys and sorrows of those who we care about. The self as divided is the bridge between our conscious self-awareness and our subconscious desires and dispositions. Finally, our embodiment enables physical action (everything we do) and sensual experience (including the visceral manifestations of emotions), as well as being the object of our body image; these are the preserve of the self as embodied. It should be noted that the self as unitary plays a central role in the autonomy of persons because it is home to the higher order mental states required for autonomous choices. To connect back to the earlier discussion of identity, I would argue that it is through processes associated with our self as unitary that we find coherence between our multiple identities. I return to these concepts at various points throughout this thesis and, for the sake of convenience, as Meyers (2005) did, I sometimes refer to them as the ‘unitary self’, the ‘social self’ etc. but I should emphasise that these terms do not denote separate entities but, rather, describe dimensions of the self and serve to focus attention on or frame “a dimension of subjective life” (2005: 31).

Personal autonomy is thus heavily implicated with social context. As Meyers (1987, 1989) points out, the competencies on which autonomy depends can only be developed in the context of social relationships, practices and institutions: social context mediates the autonomy of persons. The process of self-shaping described

above depends upon the faculties of introspection, memory, imagination, verbal communication, reason and volition (Meyers, 1989) and the exercise of these is, to some degree, contingent on the emotional conditions of “self-worth”, “self-trust” and “self-respect” (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000a: 21). Additionally, according to Taylor (1985a), it is strong evaluation and an openness to our horizons of significance that enable us to act in accordance with or choose our values. All of the above can be undermined or enhanced by historical and concurrent sociocultural contexts. For instance, oppressive socialisation could impinge upon self-trust, self-worth or self-respect, preventing the development or use of the competencies on which autonomy depends. Our autonomy is inevitably suppressed in a culture, not only through overt restrictions of freedom, but also through social norms, institutions, practices and relationships that limit the range of options available to people (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000a). Some argue that it is possible for a dominant group to deliberately manipulate culture, through the media and education, in order to subjugate the majority, in a process that Gramsci (1992) termed ‘cultural hegemony’.

Bearing in mind the power of socialisation, enculturation and cultural hegemony to undermine our ability to self-shape, to be an autonomous person we must be in a position to evaluate and either accept or reject the predominant values of a social context. In order for this to be possible, we must be aware that we are subject to these sociocultural processes and the content of what they impose upon us (Elster, 1986; Gramsci, 1992). Castoriadis (1991), placing the role of social context at the heart of his theory of autonomy, extends principles of autonomy of the individual to the collective. He posits that an individual can only be autonomous as part of an autonomous collective. Just as personal autonomy is dependent on self-knowledge, a collective’s autonomy is dependent on its knowledge of its constitution and the processes that make it as it is; and, just as an individual is autonomous when they take control over their identity, a collective is autonomous when its members are knowingly engaged in its creation and recreation: an autonomous collective is democratic in its truest form. The autonomy of the individual and the collective are interdependent – an autonomous collective must be instituted by autonomous individuals and without being involved in the institution of the collective of which we are a part, we are subject to social forces over which we have no control. This

points to the role of responsibility of the individual for contributing to the propagation or perpetuation of an autonomy enhancing social context.

In sum, if we take a view of the individual as socially constituted and learning as identity construction, it seems that learner autonomy - conceived as being in control over one's identity construction – and personal autonomy (conceived as self-shaping) are interdependent constructs. Learner autonomy is concerned with the sociocultural processes involved in the construction of the self and personal autonomy refers to the processes involved in making choices, the control. Thus, from an inquiry point of view, personal and learner autonomy are inseparable, and my methodology aimed to take account of both. In addition, I have discussed autonomy in this section as a universal philosophical construct, but efforts to understand how it manifests must focus on the particularities of individuality, from a relational perspective. Another implication of this social view of autonomy, as we have seen, is the entailment of social responsibility, which underlies the political perspective on autonomy, which is discussed next.

## 2.5 Learner autonomy as inherently political

As noted in section 2.1, when the construct of learner autonomy was first introduced into language education by Holec (1980), its ideological imperative was explicit: to improve quality of life by simultaneously fostering in individuals personal freedom and a sense of responsibility and agency in society. However, some argued that through its mainstream adoption, it was “technologized, psychologised and universalised” (Pennycook, 1997: 35), which implied its de-radicalisation (Benson, 1997; Oxford, 2003; Pennycook, 1997). As mentioned above, Pennycook (1997) criticised the field for tacitly subscribing to a liberal humanist conception of autonomy that implied rational self-control, which is vulnerable to criticism on the basis that our rational processes can be undermined by our subconscious and that our selves are, at least in part, a product of our socio-political contexts. As a result of this, he lamented, language education shied away from more radical versions of learner autonomy, such as those of Illich (1971), who argued that traditional

education systems were oppressive and sought liberational forms of education outside of formal institutional education, and Freire (1970) who sort to engage oppressed people in the struggle for their own liberation. Pennycook was an early voice in what Oxford (2003: 88) describes as the “political-critical perspective on learner autonomy”, which acknowledges its ideological content and the power dynamics that exist in any context.

Representative of the political-critical perspective, Pennycook (1997: 39) takes the view of autonomy as:

“the struggle to become the author of one’s own world, to be able to create one’s own meanings, to pursue cultural alternatives amid the cultural politics of everyday life”

and emphasises the importance of developing the voices of learners. Van Lier (2004: 8) elaborates on this definition in his ecological approach to the classroom:

“learners are autonomous, i.e. they are allowed to define the meaning of their own acts within their social context (Shotter, 1984: 146 cited in Oyama, 2000: 189). Autonomy in an ecological approach does not mean independence or individualism, however. It means having authorship over one’s own actions, having a voice that speaks one’s words, and being emotionally connected to one’s speech (Damasio, 2003), within one’s community of practice (Wenger, 1998a). This type of autonomy is dialogical in Bakhtin’s sense (1981): socially reproduced, but appropriated and made one’s own.”

Jiménez Raya et al. (2007: 1) bring the entailments of social responsibility and critical awareness to their definition of learner autonomy as:

“the competence to develop as self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participants in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal and social transformation.”

Although the emphasis differs, there is clear overlap with research done from a sociocultural perspective. Both are concerned with the way in which social context shapes individuals, but a political perspective emphasises the oppressive potential of social contexts, the struggle involved in expressing one's autonomy in the face of it and the critical awareness that is required to do so. Methods used to generate data for empirical research from a sociocultural perspective, with their emphasis on the individual in social context, are sensitive to power dynamics, but might require different interpretative frameworks.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In sum, there is no disagreement that learner autonomy is fundamentally the capacity to take control over our own learning. There is, however, controversy over what learning is and also what it means to be in control of it. I take a social constructivist position on learning, meaning that learning is a process of identity construction through our experience of social participation, which inevitably simultaneously involves the construction of places. Such a position also implies that our capacity to exercise control over our learning (and our lives) is socially mediated/constituted: it is dependent on faculties and emotional conditions that are contingent on social conditions. Researching learner autonomy from this perspective demands deep insights into the development of individuals' identities in relation to their contexts, which requires insights into students' perspectives on their embodied, sociohistorical and emplaced experiences in all domains of life. Specifically, in the context of NLAU, I seek answers to the following questions:

1. How do NLAU students construct their identities in relation to the immediate and broader sociocultural, and physical context of NLAU?
2. How do they exercise control over this process?
3. What role do their histories play in these processes?

Together, these questions could be considered secondary questions to the overarching question stated at the end of the last chapter:



- How is learner autonomy manifested in the context of an autonomy-oriented university in Japan?

The next chapter will discuss the methods by which I addressed these questions.

# Chapter 3 – Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I develop research methods to address the questions stated at the end of the last chapter that serve to address the broad question of *how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of an autonomy-oriented international university in Japan*. These questions are:

1. How do NLAU students construct their identities in relation to the immediate and broader sociocultural, and physical context of NLAU?
2. How do they exercise control over this process?
3. What role do their histories play in these processes?

The resulting methodology took an ethnographic approach, and generated data by means of: Multimodal Narratives (MNs) of six students' experiences of learner autonomy in NLAU; a participatory Student-Led Inquiry (SLI) involving six student inquiry group members (IGMs) in generating and interpreting data on thirty-five other students at the university; and autoethnography, drawing on my 10 years of experience as a faculty member of NLAU. I then drew on multimodal social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) to analyse the multimodal narratives and, informed by principles of inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I coded and interpreted all of the available data, which I then synthesised in relation to the literature outlined in Chapter 2 and further relevant literature.

In developing the methodology, I first outline criteria according to which I develop the methods. I develop these criteria on the basis of my ontological and epistemological position, conclusions that I drew on the nature of learner autonomy in the Chapter 2, the Literature Review, and my ethical commitments. I then detail the methodological structure and the methods employed in the

generation and interpretation of data in addressing the research questions stated above. I finally narrate the inception of the participatory component of the project, first detailing the practical and ethical dilemmas that were involved in participant recruitment, then introducing the participants and setting the scene for the participatory component of the inquiry.

## 3.2 The development of methodological criteria

Here I detail the development of the criteria on which I build the research methodology for the present inquiry. The first subsection, 3.2.1 'Philosophical foundations', details my ontological and epistemological position and how it influenced the choice of methods. The second subsection, 3.2.2 'The nature of learner autonomy and its methodological implications', reviews conclusions I drew on learner autonomy in the literature review and discusses their implications for methodological design. Then, in 3.2.3 'Ethical commitments and their implications', I introduce ethical considerations that informed the development of the methodology. To conclude the section, I delineate the methodological criteria that result from the preceding subsections in the final subsection, 3.2.4 'Methodological criteria'.

### *3.2.1 Philosophical foundations*

As I stated in the Introduction, this study takes a social constructivist epistemological position, which implies that it is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. Such work often studiously avoids metaphysical discussions, but this does not imply the absence of an ontology, merely that their assumptions about the nature of reality remain implicit (Heron, 1996; Kincheloe, 2011; Kincheloe and Berry, 2004). Here I wish to make explicit my ontological position because it influenced my methodological choices. Like Heraclitus, Hegel, Dewey, Whitehead and Deleuze (Seibt, 2018), my fundamental metaphysical position is that reality is an assembly of processes that are physical, organic, social and cognitive and interact at and across levels of dynamic organisation.

The following are implications of this 'process ontology': all phenomena emerge from relations between interconnected elements (which are themselves processes, on a smaller scale); change is constant, even apparent stasis is the result of relative equilibrium of dynamic relations; people, and all other things, are inescapably part of this reality. This view, as we will see in the next subsection, is consistent with my position on the nature of learner autonomy. It also has implications for epistemology, how we can know the world, which is discussed next.

Situated as we are, we construct knowledge of the world from our position within it, individually and with others. From this situation, our sensual experiences are made meaningful through interpretation, in reference to existing knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1984) using multimodal symbolic resources, such as language, images and other representational modes (Kress, 2010). Since these symbolic resources are largely socially constructed, our knowledge is, to at least some degree, a product of the social context in which we are situated (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and much knowledge is shared among members of a community (Wenger, 1998a) and is (re)constructed within the minds of individuals through interaction with members of that community (Vygotsky, 1978): our knowledge is both subjective and intersubjective. Since our experience of the world involves the interaction between sensual experience and knowledge that is both subjective and intersubjective, the world as we know it is partially constructed, individually and socially; the result of our minds interpenetrating the objective world (Heron, 1996). I thus take a social constructivist position on not only learning, but also knowledge. The research act is no different to the process of knowledge construction that I have described: as researchers we are unavoidably a part of what we are studying (Charmaz, 2014). Considering the complexity of the reality implied by the processual view and our inescapable situation within it, our view of reality is limited. This has prompted some to propose a distinction between observable reality and the fundamental, yet unobservable, reality (Bhaskar, 2008; Kincheloe and Berry, 2004). Kincheloe and Berry (2004), refer to this distinction as 'explicate' and 'implicate' orders of reality. Our understanding of the implicate orders of reality requires

interpretation of the explicate orders of reality. This points to the importance of theory in understanding a given phenomenon.

The implications of my ontological position for methodological design are that methods used must be sensitive to dynamic relationships between physical, organic, social and cognitive processes. And from the perspective of my epistemological position, understanding how learner autonomy, as a psychosocial phenomenon, manifests itself in a given context requires methods that provide insights into the perspectives of those who experience it.

Considering the unique position of each individual, perspectives of multiple members of the community under investigation are necessary to understand the role of the context in their learner autonomy. By doing this, it is possible to glean insights into both subjective knowledge of individuals and also intersubjective knowledge shared among members of the community. However, as I mentioned in section 1.3, I must also acknowledge my own subjectivity in interpreting perspectives of community members. This highlights the importance of “self-reflexivity” (by continually assessing my own biases and motivations in the relation to the research process)(Tracy, 2010: 842) in this aim. Finally, since we experience the world multimodally, and each mode of representation has its own unique representational affordances (Kress, 2010), enabling members of the community in question to express themselves multimodally provides insights into dimensions of experience that would not be possible in a single representational mode. Thus, the generation of multimodal data is desirable.

### *3.2.2 The nature of learner autonomy and its methodological implications*

Implications of my conclusions on learner autonomy, outlined in the literature review, align with those of the philosophical foundations, but they offer increased definition in focus. Since the research questions are the result of these conclusions, I approach the task of developing the criteria in reference to each research question.

In addressing the first question - *how do NLAU students construct their identities in relation to the immediate and broader sociocultural, and physical context of NLAU?* - we must consider all the ways that individuals construct their identities. According to sociocultural approaches to learner autonomy research, individuals construct their identities through participating in multiple, probably overlapping Communities of Practice (CoPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and this refers not only to activity with people in our immediate context, but also engagement in the practices of broader social communities (Wenger, 1998a). This implies that methods must yield data on the multiple communities in which individuals participate and, in line with Gu (2014) and Wenger (1998a), offer insights into the ways that individuals not only 'engage' in their interpersonal relationships, but also 'imagine' their place in the broader sociocultural context and their futures, and attempt to 'align' themselves with broader structures and societal enterprises. In addition, research on space and place tells us that the construction of individuals' identities is a mutual process in which participation in activities that transform a space into a place contributes to an individual's identity and also to the identity of the place. Thus, we must also consider individuals' relationships with the spaces and places in which they are situated. This all points to the need for data on relationships between physical, social and psychological domains, which is consistent with the processual view of reality implied by my ontological position.

In order to address the question of how students exercise control over their identity construction, we must look beyond the ways that individuals are socially constructed and constrained to the ways that they "identify themselves, resist identifications, and act on their social worlds" (Norton and Toohey, 2002: 123). They may do this through "critically analysing the [D]iscourses which frame their lives, and [...] claiming or resisting them according to the effects they wish to bring about" (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001: 145-6). This is related to the question of the role of students' histories in the process of identity construction, since an awareness of one's sociohistorical constitution would be a precondition for evaluating it. This all points to the need for insights into the social and cognitive

processes by which students gain self-knowledge, choose their values (the principles by which they believe they ought to live) and make choices on the basis of them.

In sum, methods must be sensitive to the psychological, social and embodied experience across space and time, and the ways in which they engage with communities on scales from the immediate interpersonal to the global and imagined. Methods must also take account of the social and psychological processes involved in making choices in the face of social constraints. Next, I will outline the ethical commitments that informed the development of this methodology.

### *3.2.3 Ethical commitments*

In addition to meeting the ethical standards of both NLAU and the University of Westminster, I had ethical commitments that were specific to the topic, the context of this inquiry and my place in it. NLAU is a university, where I work, that I have argued places autonomy at the centre of its educational mission; and, as I stated at the beginning of the thesis, I value autonomy, my own and that of others. Considering this, I was committed to developing methods that did not undermine the autonomy of the participants and would, ideally, enhance it. With this in mind, I strove to ensure that they exercised control over aspects of the research process and to preserve their voices in the representation of the data that they generated. In addition, I was committed to ensuring that benefits that I gained from participants efforts would be reciprocated to the maximum degree possible.

Thus far, then, based on the philosophical foundations, conclusions on the nature of learner autonomy and my ethical commitments, I ascertain that the methods for the inquiry must: 1) be sensitive to dynamic relationships between physical, organic, social and cognitive processes; 2) yield insights into the individual and shared perspectives of those who experience learner autonomy in the context of the inquiry; 3) enable representation that accounts for the multimodality of

experience; 4) enable my own self-reflexivity in the interpretation of data; 5) yield insights into the ways that individuals identify with communities on multiple scales, both real and imagined, and participate in the construction of places; 6) be sensitive to the social and cognitive processes by which individuals gain self-knowledge, choose their values and make choices based on them; 7) not undermine and ideally enhance the autonomy of participants in the inquiry, by enabling them to exercise control over aspects of the research process and preserving their voices in the representation of the data that they generated; 8) and ensure that all benefits to the present inquiry gained from the efforts of participants are reciprocated to the maximum possible degree. These necessities provide a starting point for developing the criteria for the methodology for the inquiry, but there are also lessons to be learned from research that has methodology as its focus. A methodological approach that offers a framework that meets much of the criteria so far is ethnography. The next subsection draws on principles of ethnographic research to refine the criteria for this inquiry.

### *3.2.4 Lessons from ethnographic research*

Principles of ethnography provided a conceptual umbrella under which the research methods for the current inquiry could sit, thereby providing quality criteria by which methods could be developed and evaluated. Ethnography is, according to Pole and Morrison (2003: 16):

“An approach to social research based on the first-hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to [generate] data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location.”

According to this definition, with its emphasis on the subjective experiences of individuals who inhabit a particular location, the aims of ethnography align with necessities of the present inquiry, outlined above. Although ethnography can include quantitative and qualitative data (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010), given my social constructivist epistemology, I rely solely on qualitative methods. In



terms of methods, although the mainstay of ethnographers are traditionally open-ended interviews and participant observation, a principled yet eclectic approach to developing methods is endorsed, conceiving research as a *craft* rather than blind adherence to prescriptive methods (Abram, 2014). Although there is precedence for employing ethnographic methods in learner autonomy research (Murray et al., 2014, for instance), I do not draw on these and instead employ only the quality criteria for qualitative research, commonly associated with ethnography, along with the guiding principles summarised at the end of the last section, to develop coherent criteria for the development of methods for the present inquiry. Drawing on the work of Tracy (2010), the criteria for quality qualitative research are 'rich rigour', 'sincerity', 'credibility', 'meaningful coherence' as well as 'ethics'. I elaborate on these below.

Richness is achieved through an abundance of data and theoretical constructs of a wide variety (Weik, 2007) and rigour manifests in the diligence and an appropriate amount of time, effort, care and thoroughness spent on the research (Tracy, 2010). Sincerity involves self-reflexivity and 'transparency', being honest and self-critical about the research process (Seale, 1999). For Tracy (2010) research is credible if it is trustworthy enough to act upon or to use as a basis for making decisions. It is achieved through 'thick descriptions', 'multivocality', and 'member reflections'. Thick descriptions account for the complex specificity of phenomena and the circumstances surrounding them (Geertz, 1973). The term multivocality refers to the representation of the multiple voices of those whose perspectives were drawn upon in the research (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Including participants of the research in the interpretation of the data by means of member reflections, better grounds the conclusions of the research in the perspectives of those who live the phenomenon being examined. Meaningful coherence refers to the extent to which the methods are appropriate for the research focus and the way the research questions, the data and the literature relate to each other (Tracy, 2010); the guiding principles for methodological design help to ensure this. Finally, the ethics of the study, in addition to that described above, is dependent on meeting the ethical standards of the institutions involved (the University of Westminster and NLAU, in this case),

ensuring that the outcomes justify any harm caused by the research and maintaining a respectful relationship with the research participants (Tracy, 2010). Synthesis of the quality criteria described here, and the necessities outlined at the end of the previous section resulted in the methodological criteria by which the methods for the present inquiry were developed and later judged (see 3.2.5 for a summary).

Principles of ethnographic research informed many of the methodological choices I made. There were, however, ways in which my study deviated from what is typical of ethnographic research. While, as mentioned above, ethnography typically relies on participant observation and casual conversations (Campbell and Lassiter, 2015; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; LeCompte and Schensul, 2010), I sought to engage the participants of the research more fully in the process of generating and interpreting the data, by means of facilitating participatory inquiry. By engaging students in a partially structured inquiry, their voices were privileged not only in the generation data, but also in its interpretation. This approach is justified and explained in detail in section 3.3.1, but in short, this was desirable from the perspective of both its credibility and ethics.

### *3.2.5 Summary of methodological criteria*

To conclude the discussion on the criteria by which I develop the methods of the inquiry, I summarise them here. Methods must achieve:

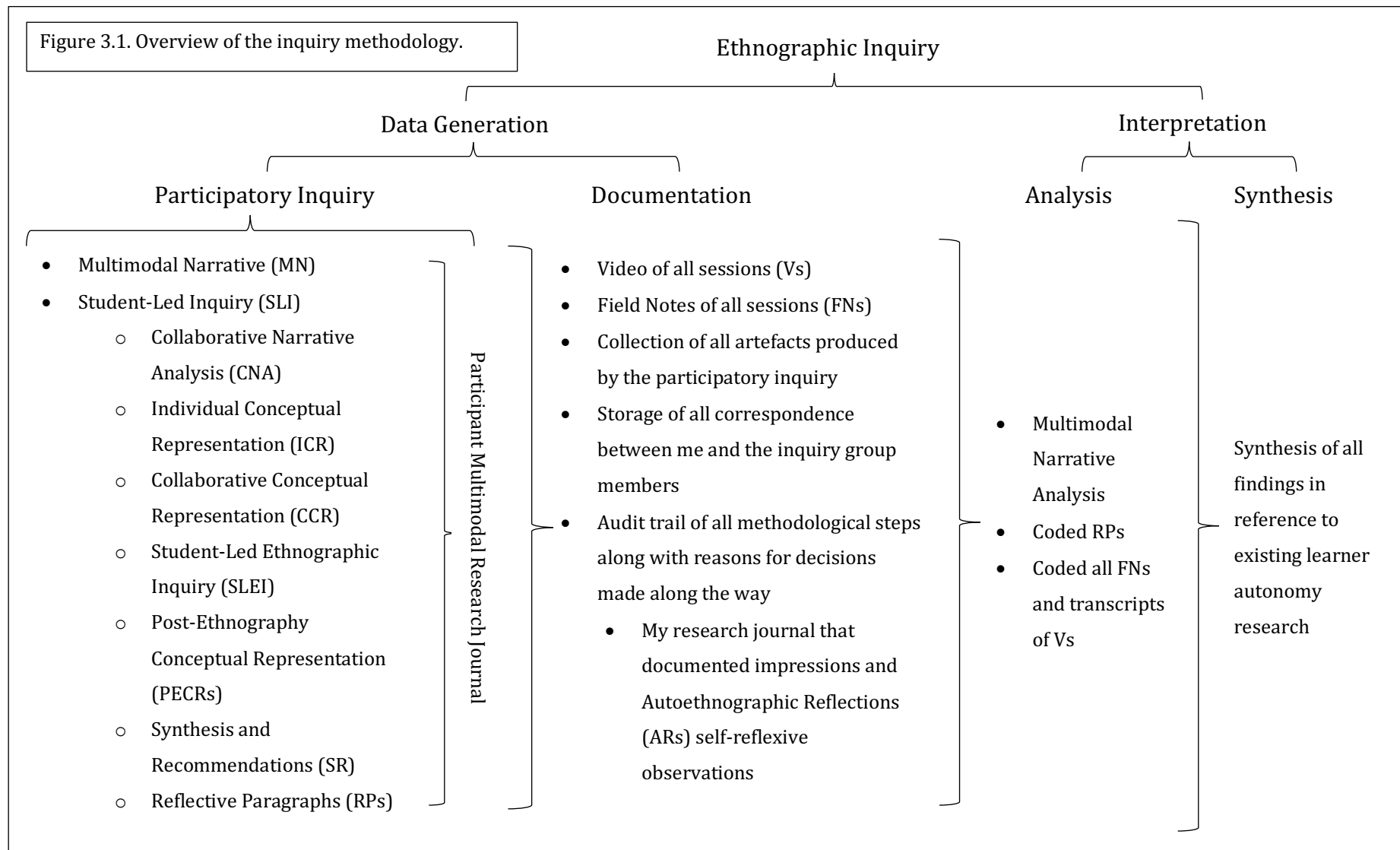
- ‘Rich rigour’, achieved by means of abundant data interpreted from various theoretical perspectives, generated with due diligence and an appropriate amount of time effort and care
- ‘Sincerity’, by means of self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher and the inquiry group members and transparency of all stages of the inquiry process
- ‘Credibility’, through thick descriptions that reflect the complexity of learner autonomy in context, representing the multiple voices drawn upon

in the generation of data, and input from participants in the interpretation of the resulting data

- ‘Meaningful coherence’ between the research focus, research questions, the literature, and my ontological and epistemological position. This means that methods must:
  - Be sensitive to dynamic relationships between physical, organic, social and psychological processes
  - Yield insights into the individual and shared perspectives of those who experience learner autonomy in the context of the inquiry
  - Enable representation that accounts for the multimodality of experience
  - Yield insights into the ways that individuals identify with communities on multiple scales, both real and imagined; and participate in the construction of places
  - Be sensitive to the social and cognitive processes by which individuals gain self-knowledge, choose their values and make choices based on them
- ‘Ethicality’, in accordance with the ethical guidelines of both NLAU and the University of Westminster, which stipulate non-maleficence, and also criteria specific to this inquiry:
  - Do not undermine and ideally enhance the autonomy of participants in the inquiry, by enabling them to exercise control over aspects of the research process and preserving their voices in the representation of the data that they generated
  - Ensure that all benefits to the present inquiry gained from the efforts of participants are reciprocated to the maximum possible degree.

In the next section, I detail the methods that I employed in the generation and interpretation of data for the present inquiry.

Figure 3.1. Overview of the inquiry methodology.



### 3.3 Methods

In this section, I describe and provide a rationale for the methods that I utilised in generating, analysing, interpreting and synthesising data in order to address the research questions stated at the beginning of the chapter. I detail the 'participatory inquiry' (Bergold and Thomas, 2012; Heron and Reason, 1997) by which I generated data on the perspectives of NLAU students (section 3.3.1). I then delineate the methods of analysis, interpretation and synthesis (section 3.3.2). The following section (3.4) will discuss the practicalities of their implementation. An overview of the methodology can be seen in figure 3.1.

#### *3.3.1 Data generation methods: participatory inquiry*

In generating data for the inquiry, I developed methods informed by principles of 'participatory inquiry', which involves planning and conducting research projects *with* people who are involved in the phenomena under study (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). Specifically, I engaged research participants in the process of generating and interpreting the data. This approach coheres with the methodological criterion of yielding insights into the individual and shared perspectives of those who experience learner autonomy in the context of the inquiry. It also promises to assist in meeting the criterion of not undermining and ideally enhancing the autonomy of participants in the inquiry, by enabling them to exercise control over aspects of the research process and preserving their voices in the representation of the data that they generated. In meeting these criteria, the methods promised to perform well against the quality criteria of ethicality and credibility.

Broadly speaking, the relationship between the researcher and the participants in participatory inquiry is reciprocal: through their involvement in the project, participants usually hope to gain new perspectives on and improve an aspect of their life (Bergold and Thomas, 2012), thereby increasing ethicality. A participatory approach that places ethics at its core and assists in enhancing the autonomy of the participants is 'Cooperative Inquiry' (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 1997). This

approach, as it is prescribed by Heron (1996), rests on the axiology that “[h]uman flourishing is intrinsically worthwhile” (Heron, 1996: 11) and is achieved by balancing individual autonomy, cooperation between people and participation in social structures; and is interdependent with the flourishing of the planetary ecosystem. Heron (1996) argues that the capacity for participative decision-making developed through Cooperative Inquiry offers the potential to involve people in decision making in any social context that affects their flourishing; and to speak for the ecosystem of which they are a part. In this way, it develops the capacity for self-direction, one of the ways that my study promised to serve the interests of the participants. The means by which these capacities are developed is through the democratisation of both content and method. Democracy over all content was not possible in the present inquiry since I came to the project with a research agenda and a specific topic in mind. Nevertheless, in line with the principles of Cooperative Inquiry, the framework I developed included participants in planning and carrying out the generation, analysis and interpretation of data. The result of this was an ‘intersubjective inquiry space’ (Heron and Reason, 1997), where the voices of the participants were included for as long as they wished. Such an approach ensured that the participants were subjects rather than objects of the research and the risk of the inquiry being exploitative was reduced because the knowledge and skills that the participants gained through the project lent it pedagogical value. Adding to these intangible benefits, reciprocation was assured by the provision of course credits, which I was able to negotiate for the participants (details of this are provided later). With regards to credibility, including multiple participants in generating and interpreting data on their own experiences of the area under inquiry, ensures that multivocality and member reflections are integral to the inquiry process.

The data were generated from three qualitatively different sources, these were: Multimodal Narratives (MNs), Student-Led Inquiry (SLI) and my Autoethnographic Reflections (ARs). Before detailing each one, I explain how they relate to one another and to the inquiry as a whole. The MNs represent the subjective experiences of individual students, which are initially interpreted in terms of individual trajectories. The focus of the SLI, which included synthesis of all the MNs, was on the context of NLAU. In terms of my ARs I acknowledge that my positionality influenced

the interpretation involved throughout the study, including methodological and representational choices, as well as analysing and synthesising the data, and I attempt to make this explicit where appropriate. However, additionally, I bracket out my own experiences as a teacher in the university and present them alongside conclusions drawn from the student generated data as data in their own right. While my priority was to privilege the voices of the students, being the embodiment of the phenomenon in question, I also reasoned that my own alternative perspective on the context was valuable for the inquiry and, by bracketing my observations out and making them explicit, the role they played in my synthesis would be more transparent than it would otherwise. First, I elaborate on the use of MNs.

### *3.3.1.1 Multimodal Narratives*

For reasons that I explain in this subsection, I decided that the primary data would take the form of MNs. The narrative form lends itself to the exploration of experience in that it is the most basic way that we human beings make our experiences meaningful, and locate them in time and place (Bruner, 1986). This happens not only on the level of discrete experiences, but narrative construction is also an interpretive process that helps us to place our experiences in the continuity of our life. We relate micro-narratives to the broader narrative of our life in an attempt to achieve ‘narrative unity’ (MacIntyre, 1981). In this sense, narrative is one way in which we organise our experience, on multiple scales, into knowledge of ourselves and our place in the world. As such, narrative is a coherent form of knowledge that provides insights into all dimensions of experience: the inner worlds of their teller; their social context (from the immediate to the broader “ever-expanding social milieu” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 3); change over time and causal relationships (Bateson, 1994; Geertz, 1995); and their concept of place (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

The explanation, so far, demonstrates the relationship between subjectivity and narrative, which is consistent with the *constructivist* aspect of my epistemological position. In accounting for the *social* constructivist perspective (like Moen, 2006), however, we must consider narratives, in part, the product of the sociohistorical

context in which the teller is situated. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1986) dialogical view of human action, Moen (2006) argues that narratives, rather than being only the product of an individual's interpretation of their experience, are the product of multiple voices: a reflection of the voice of the addressee and other voices experienced in life and in culture. In this way, narratives are at once personal stories shaped by the knowledge, experiences, values and feelings of the person telling them and they are collective stories that are shaped by the addressees and the cultural, historical and institutional settings in which they are told. This raises questions about the relationship between narratives, experience and reality. In addressing such questions, Bruner (1986) distinguishes between life 'lived', 'experienced' and 'told'. A life lived is what actually happened. A life experienced is the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts and meanings known to the person who lived it. A life told is the narrative or narratives, influenced by the conventions that constrain its telling, the audience and the cultural context. As such narrative provides insights into the psychology of the teller, the context in which they are situated and the relationship between the two, making it well suited to the task of understanding learner autonomy as it manifests itself in a particular context. Perhaps for these reasons, narrative has been used extensively to explore learner autonomy (Aoki, 2008; Aoki and Hamakawa, 2003; Benson et al., 2003; Chik and Breidbach, 2011; Gao, 2013; Gao and Zhang, 2011; Karlsson and Kjisik, 2007; Kuchah and Smith, 2011; Nix, 2007; Oxford et al., 2007; Paiva, 2005, 2011; Sade, 2011; Shao and Wu, 2007). And, in some cases, multimodal narratives have been utilised (Menezes, 2008).

My emphasis on multimodality arose from my epistemological stance, that meaning is made utilising the multimodal symbolic resources available in the culture (Kress, 2010). I wanted to ensure that all modes were available to the participants in representing their experiences to maximise the range of meanings that could be expressed. While language offers a relatively unambiguous chronological accuracy (Taylor, 2016), an exclusive focus on language would fail to acknowledge the diverse ways in which we engage with the world, not only orally and literarily, but also visually, kinesthetically and musically. Visual modes, for instance, better capture the embodied nature of knowledge and evoke emotional dimensions of experience, by



deferring the intellectualisation of lived experiences and the ideas of “flesh and blood beings” (Weber, 2008: 46), as well as more accurately portraying the spatial dimensions of experience (Kress, 2010). In addition to multimodality, considering the multilinguality of NLAU, linguistic aspects of the narratives were potentially multilingual, a combination of participants’ mother tongues and the additional languages that they are required to study.

The first task assigned to the IGMs, prior to any collaboration, was to work individually, experimenting with various modes and media (such as storytelling, drawing, painting, music, sound, movement, three-dimensional art and digital media), to articulate their personal experiences of learning in NLAU. While working with the group, I avoided using the term autonomy because, as I expounded in the last chapter, autonomy is multifaceted and can, therefore, be conceived in different ways, making it ambiguous – it is often equated with independence or individualism, for instance. Thus, for the purpose of generating data not constrained by the inquiry group’s preconceived notions of autonomy, I used the phrase ‘control over learning’ in lieu of learner autonomy. Considering the discussion of learner autonomy in the literature review, it is uncontroversial to assume that ‘control’ seems to lie at the heart of both personal and learner autonomy. The result of the task was an MN constructed by each IGM that served as the starting point for their SLI; they analysed each one as a group. In addition to and independently of this, I analysed the MNs. I deal with the MNs in Chapter 4, where I present the MNs along with the inquiry group’s and my own analysis and interpretation within a narrative of the inquiry process, which also details how the task was presented to the inquiry group.

### *3.3.1.2 Student-led inquiry*

I sought to generate rich data in multiple voices (and modes) and to maintain that multivocality in the analysis and interpretation of the data by means of a Student-Led Inquiry (SLI). This involved, first, the inquiry group interpreting their MNs and then generating and interpreting further data. I conceptualised the relationship between the experiences of the students, their narratives of them and their analyses by means of Heron and Reason’s (2008) ‘extended epistemology’. The extended

epistemology is grounded in a participatory form of knowing, which is consistent with my social constructivist position, in that it stipulates that the individual knows their world through participation in it: our minds shape our world through interaction with that which lies within our reach. Much of this world consists of other knowers. Participatory knowing involves the “empathic communion with the inward experience of being” and the “enactment of its form” (Heron, 1996: 11) through the imaging and shaping involved in our perception. This position is then extended to account for how the mind, in collaboration with the minds of others, builds on this fundamental form of knowing. In the extended epistemology, this fundamental form is referred to as 'experiential knowing' and added to this are 'presentational knowing', 'propositional knowing' and 'practical knowing'. Presentational knowing is the expression and communication of our experiences, through narrative, visual arts, performing arts, poetry or music. This clearly overlaps with what I have already stated about narratives and multimodal narratives. However, the addition of propositional knowing, which involves the construction of concepts and theories, provides a conceptual path to what is traditionally conceived as analysis. Propositional knowing, Heron and Reason (2008) argue, is the basis for action making it an important intermediary between presentational knowing and the final form of knowing, practical knowing, which refers to the skills and competencies involved in engaging in action or practice.

This extended epistemology informed the structure of the SLI framework, which consisted of the following research tasks: Multimodal Research Journals (MJRs), Collaborative Narrative Analysis (CNA), Individual Conceptual Representation (ICR), Collaborative Conceptual Representation (CCR), Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry (SLEI), Post-Ethnography Conceptual Representation (PECR), Synthesis and Recommendations (SR) and Participant Reflections (PRs). What I describe here is how the tasks were conceived in the design phase. The integrity of this structure was preserved to the end of the SLI, but its implementation inevitably (considering the democratic principles on which it rests) involved some negotiation and reinterpretation. Details of how these tasks were enacted will follow in Chapter 5 where I present the resulting data.

At the start of the project, I provided each participant with a notebook and a USB stick for their MJR. In this, I prompted (see appendix 3.1 for the full prompt) them to keep track of their thoughts and actions, in any mode they favoured, using the journal as a reflective space as well as a record of the research process. The first task of the SLI was the CNA, which was conducted immediately after each IGM presented their MN. I provided a written prompt that asked them "to identify the *ways* in which each person *exercised control over their learning* and what has *influenced* this." (emphasis in the original, see appendix 3.2 for the full prompt). Then, after completing the CNA for all IGMs, was the ICR; they were asked to consider the results of their analysis and conceptualise NLAU as place where students exercise control over their learning "categoris[ing] ways that students exercise control over their learning and the elements that play a role in helping or hindering this process and show the relationships between them" (see appendix 3.3 for the full prompt). They were asked to do this individually between sessions and then, after sharing these, they were asked to collaborate to create the CCR (see appendix 3.4 for the prompt). By asking them to work alone first, I reasoned that the voices of those who might be inclined to passivity in group work would also contribute to the CCR. These tasks constituted a transition from presentational to propositional knowing.

The CCR represented the intersubjective voice of the inquiry group, which in itself provided valuable insights into learner autonomy as it manifests in NLAU. However, considering the heterogeneity that is inherent to NLAU, I deduced that more could be learned by inquiring into the experiences of other students. Thus, the next task in the framework was the SLEI. As in earlier tasks, I provided a written prompt (see appendix 3.5 for the full prompt), which instructed them to consider what they had learned so far about learning in NLAU and the forces that influence it, and then think of research questions to guide further inquiry. Then they were guided through the development of methods to inquire into the perspectives of other NLAU students. The details of these methods and the process of their development will be detailed in Chapter 5, but in short, their inquiry yielded qualitative data on the perspectives of an additional thirty-five students, which was used to reconceptualise NLAU as a place where students exercise control over their learning, producing the PECR. The PECR represented the perspective of the inquiry group after it had been broadened

through their inquiry into the perspectives of other students, which gave them a view of NLAU less constrained by their own personal experiences and a greater appreciation of its heterogeneity. Through the SLEI, the group were able to include voices of other students in the PECR, thereby diminishing their own voices and strengthening the intersubjectivity of the data. They synthesised their findings and, on the basis of this, the group felt that they were able to, tentatively, speak for the student body, so they drafted recommendations to the university administration, in their SR. Finally, in the interests of gaining insights into the participants' experiences of participating in the research, I had each of them produce a PR, reflecting on their experience as participants in the inquiry, the results of which are also addressed in Chapter 5. This concludes the description of the framework for the SLI. Next, I explain the Autoethnographic Reflections (ARs).

### *3.3.1.3 Autoethnographic Reflections*

Although the lived experiences of the students were the primary focus of this inquiry, they do not exist in a vacuum, so my ten years of experience as a part of the NLAU community promised to provide a different perspective on NLAU with which I could compare and contrast the data generated by the students, including their analyses and interpretation. However, I endeavoured to keep my insights separate because my role as faculty and the power that it affords me threatened to undermine my goal of privileging the voices of the students. By being systematic and explicit in relating my own experiences to the data (and the literature), I built sincerity into the research design.

I evoke 'autoethnography' to conceptualise this data source as the approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). Autoethnography embraces the inherent subjectivity of qualitative research and the inescapable role that the researcher plays in the phenomenon under inquiry (Ellis et al., 2015), making it coherent with my methodology as a whole. That said, due to my priority of privileging the students' voices, I strove to keep these insights

separate until my synthesis in Chapter 6. Therefore, treating my own experiences as data did not negate the need for reflexivity throughout the research process.

#### *3.3.1.4 Methods of documentation*

While ethnography celebrates the intuitive, improvisational qualities of the art of research, it also emphasises systematicity in procedures used to document and analyse data, ensuring sincerity. With this in mind, after gaining consent from the participants I video recorded all of our research sessions, kept detailed notes, including not only details of the events but also my own impressions and reflexive processes. The resulting Videos (Vs) and Field Notes (FNs) constituted sources of data that were drawn on throughout the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data. In writing the FNs, initially I took brief notes to record my impressions during the session, but I quickly abandoned this technique because it seemed to distract the participants and it distanced me from them and, I surmised, caused them to feel observed. Instead, immediately after the session, I would write a first draft of the FNs for the session in which I recorded the structure of the session and any impressions I had had that I might forget. Then, later I would use the (Vs) to write detailed notes along with quotes. This note writing was the first stage in my engagement with the data. I also collected all multimodal artefacts produced by the group throughout the inquiry process; this included photographs of what they drew on the whiteboard and their MNs, among others. In addition, with the aim of ensuring transparency, I kept an 'audit trail' of all decisions regarding method. I also stored all email and social media interactions for later consideration. Finally, from the very beginning of this project I kept a reflective journal, in which I recorded impressions, inspirations, engaged with theoretical ideas and worked through quandaries.

This concludes the discussion on methods of generating data. The next section addresses the methods of analysis and interpretation.

### *3.3.2 Methods of analysis and interpretation*

The combination of data generation methods described above yielded an abundance of rich data that represented the voices, most audibly, of the inquiry group, but also of the other students who participated in the inquiry and, taking a sociocultural perspective, a whisper of all of the students who participate in NLAU as a community. In presenting the MNs, in Chapter 4, and the SLI, in Chapter 5, for reasons of ethics, credibility and meaningful coherence, I privilege the students' voices. While preserving the integrity of the voice of the inquiry group remained a priority throughout the research process, further analysis, interpretation and synthesis on my part was required to bring about a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question. One reason for this is that, although the students were best placed to speak of their subjective perspectives on their lived experiences within NLAU, they have many competing priorities which leave them limited time and motivation to reflect on the data to the same degree that I could. Additionally, I brought my own ARs, and considered the student perspectives in light of my own experiences and preconceptions, which was a reflexive exercise that added a further dimension to my understanding of the context in relation to the research questions. And, finally, relating the data to existing research on learner autonomy is valuable not only for the sake of joining the academic conversation, but also such theoretical lenses can reveal what might otherwise remain hidden (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004).

With this in mind, as is described in Chapter 4, I analysed data relating to the trajectories of the IGMs, which included the MNs, conversations between the IGMs during the CNA and other conversations relating to their trajectories. Then, as is described in Chapter 5, I interpret the data from the perspective of the context by, first, documenting the SLI and presenting resulting conclusions drawn by the inquiry group with minimal additional interpretation, privileging the voice of the inquiry group. Then, as is also described in Chapter 5, I analysed data relating to the IGMs' experiences of the inquiry process in reference to how the project influenced their learner autonomy; this data included the PRs and records of their conversations in the FNs and Vs. Finally, as is presented in Chapter 6, I synthesised the conclusions on the individual trajectories, from Chapter 4, and the conclusions

on learner autonomy in the context of NLAU, from Chapter 5, to address the research questions in Chapter 6, interpreting the results in relation to the literature. The procedures I used are described below; for data on IGMs' learning trajectories through NLAU in subsection 3.3.2.1, for data on the IGMs' of the research experience in subsection 3.3.2.2, and the general synthesis in 3.3.2.3.

### *3.3.2.1 Analysis, interpretation and presentation of data on the inquiry group members' learning trajectories*

To inquire into the IGMs' experiences of learner autonomy in NLAU, I sought to describe, analyse and interpret their representations of their learning trajectories through NLAU from the perspective of the overarching question of how learner autonomy is manifested in NLAU, in terms of the secondary research questions: 1) how NLAU students construct their identities in relation to the immediate and broader sociocultural, and physical context of NLAU; 2) how they exercise control over this process; and 3) what role their histories play in these processes. To this end, in keeping with the ethnographic approach, I drew on all relevant data: the MNs, transcripts of the presentation of the MN and the CNA, and any resulting visual artefacts (such as diagrams drawn on the whiteboard). After analysing and interpreting these data, I described the trajectory of each IGM in terms of the secondary questions above, in reference to relevant literature relating to learner autonomy. I describe here the methods I used for the analysis and interpretation of the data and for the presentation of their trajectories.

First, I analysed the visual components of the MNs by means of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic framework. This resulted in a fine-grained systematic analysis (see latter sections of appendix 3.6 for a sample), but I felt the results were highly speculative, so to avoid misrepresenting the voices of the IGMs I sought to corroborate findings from this with what was expressed in other modes and, where possible, I asked the IGMs directly about meanings expressed in the visual components.

Then I began to analyse the field notes of the CNAs, but I found that they were insufficient; I was relying heavily on the videos of the session for the specific words of IGMs, so I decided to transcribe these videos. I initially did this manually, but then I used software (Otter.ai). The initial results were inaccurate, but I was able to edit the transcription while controlling the audio within the interface, so I was ultimately able to efficiently produce an accurate transcription of the oral component of the CNAs, and I was able to refer to photographs and the videos for the visual components. Using a six-step inductive thematic analysis framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87), themes emerged from the transcription data. Through the processes involved in the creation of the transcriptions I “familiaris[ed my]self with the data”, which was followed by the “generat[ion of] initial codes”, a line-by-line process of describing the actions represented. Among these codes, I “search[ed] for themes”, an iterative process that involved categorising the codes and gathering all relevant data, testing their fit and adjusting where appropriate. Then I “review[ed the] themes” in relation to both the codes and the dataset as a whole before “defining and naming the themes” and “producing the report[s]” (the descriptions of the IGMs’ trajectories), which involved further testing of the themes against the data.

Presenting the trajectories required representational compromises. While I sought to preserve the voices of the IGMs, my primary objective was to address the research questions succinctly and coherently. Initially, I presented the transcription of the oral component of the narrative, supplemented by extracts from the CNA of additional details that emerged, then documented my analysis of the visual components in the following section, included a separate section that documented the CNA, followed by a commentary in reference to literature on learner autonomy (see appendix 3.7 for a sample). This, however, resulted in too many words, considering the word limits of the thesis, and it lacked focus. I concluded that my interpretation of the data needed to be integral to its presentation. Therefore, I structured my account of the IGMs’ trajectories in terms of the emergent themes, relating them to existing learner autonomy research. This process effectively integrated analysis and interpretation of the data and, by writing my accounts of the trajectories, which involved identifying data to develop the themes, I was



simultaneously testing the consistency of the themes, which occasionally led to their adjustment, division, or combination, thereby grounding them firmly in the data.

### *3.3.2.2 Analysis of the inquiry group members' experiences of the research process*

I acknowledge that due to the autonomy-oriented design of the methods, the inquiry was a deliberate intervention into the learner autonomy of the IGMs. However, I considered that, since the inquiry took place within the NLAU context, the interpretation of data on the IGMs' experiences in this process promised to add a valuable perspective on the object of the inquiry. The data viewed from this perspective has the advantage of offering insights into processes involved in learner autonomy as they happened, rather than relying solely on retrospective interpretations and representations of past experiences. It was also an opportunity to evaluate the methods from a pedagogical perspective.

Therefore, I analysed and interpreted the following data sources: the RPs; records of dialogue between the IGMs during the inquiry sessions, found in the FNs and Vs; and records of communication between the IGMs and I between sessions and after the inquiry. I used the same method of analysis, interpretation and representation as I used for data on the trajectories of the IGMs through NLAU, described above. I present my interpretation of these within the narrative of the inquiry in Section 5B of Chapter 5.

### *3.3.2.3 Synthesis*

In synthesising the findings, I re-read Chapters 4 and 5, taking notes in the review function of Microsoft Word identifying themes that related to the secondary research questions. These resulted in provisional themes, which I used to create an outline for Chapter 6. I then returned to Chapters 4 and 5 and sought extracts that corresponded to the themes. I also searched the FNs and transcripts of the Vs. This process enabled me to test the provisional themes for veracity, leading to the

refinement of some, the elimination of others and the addition of new ones. I then endeavoured to describe the themes theoretically, utilising constructs identified in the literature review, and in additional reading prompted by the emergent themes. This back and forth between my interpretations and theoretical constructs, constrained by what I could support with the data resulted in conclusions on how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of NLAU. Then, in Chapter 7, I further synthesised findings to comment on the universal philosophical construct of learner autonomy, thereby highlighting the relevance of my study to the field, to the university and to the context of Japan.

This concludes the rationale for the methods that I employed in addressing the research questions of the inquiry. The next section details the enactment of the data generation phase of the inquiry.

### 3.4 Implementation of the data generation methods

What I describe in this section is the way I planned to enact the methods described above, in section 3.3, including the sampling and participant recruitment plan, an overview of the way that the plan was enacted and a detailed description of the initial sessions.

#### 3.4.1 *The plan*

In this subsection, I detail the way that I planned to identify and recruit appropriate inquiry group members, the schedule by which I intended to enact the participatory inquiry process described above and an overview of the ethical approval process. In developing the plan, due to practical constraints, such as limitations of time caused by the parameters of the PhD program, my teaching responsibilities and the level of commitment I could expect from student participants, I was forced to balance the quality criteria of rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, meaningful coherence and ethics with issues of feasibility. I explain the plans in reference to these concerns here. The initial plan was to conduct the inquiry during the spring semester of 2017.

In developing the sampling plan, due to the constraints mentioned above, I was forced to compromise between multivocality and richness of data on the experiences of each individual. I elected to prioritise depth over breadth: I sought deep insights into the experiences of a limited number of students rather than limited insights into the experiences of a greater number of students. I reasoned that insights into a psychosocial phenomenon as complex as learner autonomy could not be gained without abundant data on the experiences of individuals. Nevertheless, the SLI, with its SLEI, while prioritising depth, still achieved a degree of breadth. There were two levels of participation: the IGMs (of whom there were ultimately six), who generated abundant, rich data on their own experiences, and ‘participants’ in the SLI, who were of a greater number (thirty-five), but yielded data of variable depth.

In forming the inquiry group, I planned to recruit between six and ten students, regarding this a group of a manageable size for facilitation of deep reflection, yet large enough to allow for a degree of heterogeneity and multivocality. I decided that senior year degree-seeking students were desirable participants because they would have experience of every stage of the NLAU curriculum (with the exception of the latter part of the final year and graduation). These students would also be most likely to benefit from the research process (particularly if they were considering the pursuit of graduate studies); and, since they should have completed courses in a variety of subjects, they promised to bring theoretical insights to the inquiry. Finally, since their study should be almost complete, they were more likely to have time to participate.

In order to ensure that the autonomy of the students was respected, participation was to be strictly voluntary. Incentives for participation were that they would gain research experience, an opportunity for creative expression, a deeper understanding of their time at NLAU, be credited for their participation (by being named in its dissemination), and develop new knowledge and skills, building reciprocity and, therefore, ethics into the design of the study. For the purpose of recruitment, I designed a flyer and a poster (see appendix 3.8), ‘marketing’ the project as an

induction to qualitative research, as a member of a group named “Qualitative Inquirers”. Through the advice of colleagues with experiences of conducting research in this context (and Terry Lamb, my supervisor), I took a targeted approach to recruitment, identifying groups of students who were most likely to be interested in participating and be mostly likely to fully engage in the research process. In identifying appropriate students, I planned to consult with the Academic Career Support Centre (ACSC), whose duties include supporting students who endeavour to pursue graduate studies on graduation from NLAU. Additionally, I planned to target members of the Student Government, since, through their membership, they demonstrate a high level of engagement with the context of NLAU, therefore promising to yield deep insights into the lives of NLAU students. A final criterion for the selection of participants was an interest in creative expression, since this would enhance the multimodal elements of the project. I planned to approach individuals through these organisations and present them with the flyer.

I proposed no concrete schedule with dates and agendas because I wished to emphasise the participatory nature of the project and the autonomy that it afforded to the inquiry group members. Instead, I proposed that within six to eight sessions, in line with the methods described above, in section 3.2, each IGM would create an MN, then the inquiry group would perform a CNA for each MN before conducting the SLI and concluding with PRs and an SR; and throughout this process they were to complete their MJR. I planned to present this in a “Workflow” document (see appendix 3.9) to prospective participants, who had expressed an interest in the project, alongside the “Information and Consent” document (see appendix 3.10), which, in addition to describing the parameters of the project, presented their rights as participants in the project. These rights included the decision to cease participation at any time, to deny permission to disseminate any data relating to them, to view any of the products of the research, to choose whether to remain anonymous or to relinquish their anonymity and be publicly recognised for their work on the project. The document also listed my rights as the principal researcher, which included ownership of the resulting data (to be used in accordance with their rights to anonymity) and power of veto, to be exercised if I deemed the risk of negatively impacting any of the stakeholders to be too great.

I presented these plans in my application for ethical approval, first from NLAU and then from the University of Westminster. Both were approved.

Although the basic structure of the plan was followed throughout the project, the time frame over which the methods were enacted deviated significantly from the original plan. In stark contrast to the predicted six to eight sessions, there were a total of twenty sessions. Part of the reason for this was that although all six group members began the process together, two of them decided early on that, due to other commitments, they would not be able to participate fully in the original schedule and that they would repeat the process in the following term. There were, therefore, two phases to the inquiry, instead of the proposed one; the first phase consisted of twelve sessions and the second eight. As we can see, even without repeating the process, the first phase took far longer than originally planned. This was simply due to my underestimating how committed the students would be to the project and, therefore, how long each task would take. Details of how the methods were enacted are provided in Chapters 4 and 5. There were also significant differences between the way that the recruitment process was planned and the way that it actualised. For the purpose of transparency, the realities of this process are presented after I introduce the inquiry members in the next sub-section.

### *3.4.2 Recruitment of inquiry group members*

I was ultimately able to recruit six students to participate as inquiry group members (the basic information for these participants can be seen in table 3.1 and a more detailed description can be found in appendix 3.11). The recruitment process deviated from the original plan due to circumstances beyond my control. It was a complex process with a number of ethical and practical dilemmas. In the interests of transparency, I detail the process in this section.

In accordance with the original plan, I attempted to gain access to the student government, and I approached the Academic Career Support Centre about assisting in the recruitment of participants for the inquiry. These strategies were, however,

ultimately unsuccessful. Gaining access to the student government through official channels failed due to a lack of precedent for such cases. Then, after hearing my explanation, the coordinator of the Academic Career Support Centre initially agreed to hand flyers to students who were using the centre, but this decision was subsequently overruled by her superior for the reason that students might feel obliged to participate as a result of the project being endorsed by the centre.

Name	Gender	Age	Year	Completed Study Abroad
Ayuka	Female	22	Senior	Yes
Arisa	Female	22	Senior	Yes
Akari	Female	29	Junior	No
Yamato	Male	20	Junior	No
Wakako	Female	23	Senior	Yes
Yuko	Female	29	Senior	Yes

Table 3.1. Basic information about the inquiry group members (all consented to being named).

The coordinator of the Academic Career Support Centre, however, had a number of other suggestions. She offered to allow me to pitch the project in one of her classes: an anthropology class named “Self and Personhood”. She thought that many of the students in this class would meet the sampling criteria for the project. This I did, taking flyers with me, and although I was encouraged by the initial response - students were attentive and the international students’ reaction suggested that they wished that they could join too - only three flyers were taken. Nevertheless, Yuko and Wakako, two of the IGMs (see table 3.1), had been in the room diligently taking notes, so this (among other reasons, as I detail later) may have contributed to their eventual decision to participate. The coordinator of the Academic Career Support Centre also informed me that another of my colleagues was seeking collaborators from among the faculty for her “Research Methods in Social Sciences” course.

In this course, students learned about both qualitative and quantitative research methods through research projects conducted in consultation with “partners”

among the faculty, who specified a research focus that served their interests in some way and helped students to pose research questions that related to that focus. The students would then submit a report to the partner on completion of the research. On the one hand, agreeing to act in the capacity of a partner for this course seemed like a practical way to recruit students for my project, but, on the other, I had reservations for methodological reasons. For one, I felt there may be ethical implications if course credits and grades were involved in incentivising data generation in that it could change the power dynamic between inquiry group members and me. An additional concern was the format of the course, which appeared to follow a deductive mixed methods approach of posing a hypothesis on the basis of a literature review, which was to be tested with quantitative methods and then followed up with qualitative methods. I felt that this was at odds with my inquiry and might at best make it hard to communicate my own approach, since they would have learned something, possibly contradictory, immediately prior to the research and, at worst, result in a conflict between the requirements of my inquiry and those of the course. In essence, I thought it might lead to too many compromises, so I was initially reluctant to commit.

Meanwhile, with the inquiry being a regular topic in my conversations on campus, other colleagues offered to help. In particular, a colleague involved in educational research referred both Yuko and Wakako to me. Yuko, a mature student, had become a personal friend to this colleague and was receiving support in her endeavours to pursue graduate studies in social sciences after graduating from NLAU. The colleague suggested to Yuko that the inquiry would help her to achieve this end. I met Yuko at a social gathering at the colleague's house and explained the project to her, a few days after which she agreed to participate as an inquiry group member. Wakako was referred to me because she had expressed an interest to the colleague in art-based education. Although she was a little reluctant to commit when I described the project to her when the colleague brought her to my office, a few days later, she slid the signed consent form under my door. This meant I had secured two participants for the inquiry.

My next recruitment strategy was to propose the inquiry to students in the “Capstone Seminars” – seminar groups focused on writing the graduate thesis. I reasoned that these groups would consist of students who met my sampling criteria, so I approached three faculty who supervised these seminars to request permission to promote participation in my project in their seminar sessions. The first of these colleagues was enthusiastic about helping me. He suggested targeting specific students who he thought would be suitable and to approach them individually. I agreed that this strategy might help the ones who had been selected to feel privileged and, therefore, feel more motivated to participate. I had noticed in the past that a number of my Japanese colleagues use this approach to good effect. However, from an ethical perspective this could be seen as an abuse of power, so I decided that it was important for me to be at least one step removed from these negotiations and allow others to make these proposals, without informing me of who they had spoken to. This way, those approached would still have the option of not contacting me. Although to approach students directly might be acceptable in the local context, I chose to take the more ethically cautious approach of allowing others to approach them for me, leaving the opportunity for them to decline indirectly. The only student from this group who expressed an interest was Wakako, who had already agreed to participate.

The second Capstone Seminar supervisor was a little pessimistic about the possibility of promoting my research among his students because, in his view, they tended to be very preoccupied with job-hunting. Nevertheless, he agreed to let me come to his class to promote my research, which I did. Although I agreed with the targeted approach, I thought that a broadcast approach might also result in some seeds taking root, so I proceeded with an approach that was a mixture of the two and simply touted my project in the second Capstone Seminar. The third Capstone Seminar supervisor was concerned about the level of commitment required of the students. Although it was quite common for faculty to conduct surveys or interviews with his students, the level of commitment involved in my project without offering pay would be unusual, he thought. He was sceptical that the experience and skills gained would provide sufficient reciprocation for participation. Nevertheless, he asked me to send him information, which I did, but he did not reply, so I left it there.



The strategy of approaching students in the Capstone Seminars resulted in no new participants.

I was thus faced with the choice of proceeding with my project with two participants, or to integrate my project with the Research Methods for Social Sciences course. I decided that the enhanced multivocality afforded by this collaboration compensated for the other methodological concerns that I had. Nevertheless, before assenting to this collaboration, there were a few issues to be reconciled. The first was my concern that the mixed-methods approach would conflict with my purely qualitative approach. I ultimately reasoned, however, providing I was explicit in the principles behind my approach, it would be possible for the participants to differentiate between the two approaches and consider them separate. With regards to the impact of grades on the power dynamic between me and the participants, I disposed of this concern on the basis that *I* would not be assigning them a grade. However, I was also concerned that IGMs taking this course would get credit and a grade for their work (although not from me) while others would not, which could be the cause of malcontent among the participants that did not. I reasoned, however, that provided that I was transparent about this from the start, they would be in a position to decide whether they were satisfied with this situation, and they would be free to leave the project if they wished. In fact, Yuko ultimately used work completed for my project for an independent study credit with a colleague, and Wakako decided to use the work we did together as part of her graduate thesis, so this concern was resolved during the course of the project. The final issue was that the way that the course was scheduled was different to the way that my project was organised and I felt that my requirement for them to create a multimodal narrative did not fit with the course, which meant that it would be a burden in excess of the course requirements. The course was structured in keeping with a traditional positivist approach, as described above. I was concerned that if they were to develop specific hypotheses on the basis of their literature review, they might be constrained in the construction of their MN. However, the coordinator of the course and I were able to reconcile this issue by decoupling the first half of the course (research questions, literature review, hypotheses and quantitative research) from my project and only integrate the qualitative follow up with the SLI. This meant

that the MN was an additional burden but, provided this was clear when students of the course were selecting their partners, I was satisfied that this was not an ethical breach.

The coordinator of the Research Methods for Social Sciences course announced the options for research partnerships to the students in the class. Six students were enthusiastic about participating in my project, in spite of the extra work required of them. I went to the class to speak to them about the project. Unfortunately, two of the students who wanted to participate were exchange students (rather than degree-seeking students) and were, therefore, exempt from the project. This left four students: Ayuka and Arisa, who were both in their senior year, were interested in applying for graduate studies and had completed their study abroad (perfectly matching my criteria); Akari, who although she had been at NLAU for a number of years had not completed her study abroad; and Yamato, who was in his second year and had not completed his study abroad yet. Although Akari and Yamato did not quite match my sampling criteria, I decided that it was worth recruiting them. Akari was a mature student who had completed a number of years at NLAU, so I thought would bring an interesting perspective to the project. Yamato, being the only male student I had been able to recruit, would also bring a valuable perspective to the group. During the time that I was in class, I explained what participation in my project entailed and that it would, in all but the SLI, be completely separate from the course requirements. I assured them that they would not be penalised for not integrating the quantitative part with the qualitative part. My role as 'partner' for the course required me to support them in the first half of their coursework – research questions, literature review and quantitative research. Through discussion we arrived at learning spaces or the learning of additional languages, for their focus, and I told them that I was committed to helping them in any way that I could.

At this point, six students had agreed to participate in my project, which was enough to commence with the data generation phase. Nevertheless, I had been invited by an additional teacher to promote the project in his machine learning class. I was keen to do this because I surmised that students in such a class would likely have the technical expertise (or, at least, the motivation) for effectively utilising digital

resources in making their multimodal narratives. When I arrived, the teacher gave my research an endorsement and allowed me to explain my project to his students. I was heartened to see Yamato (who had already agreed to join), since this indicated that he had an interest in digital expression, an asset to the team. However, this visit resulted in no additional inquiry group members.

The result of this process was the recruitment of Ayuka, Arisa, Akari, Yamato, Wakako and Yuko, all of whom became integral to the project. In the next subsection, I document the inception of the data generation process.

### *3.4.3 Inception of the data generation process*

In this subsection, I document the initial phases of the participatory component of the inquiry for the purpose of transparency and to represent the emplaced, emotional, social character of the research process. I first detail the ‘pre-sessions’ in which I met with the newly recruited IGMs to confirm their understanding of the project. Then I describe the ‘induction session’ of the inquiry, which set in motion the inquiry process. Chapters 4 and 5 address the MN and SLI phases of the inquiry, and situate the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the associated data within the narrative of the participatory inquiry, so methodological details relevant to these phases are presented in those chapters.

#### *3.4.3.1 Pre-sessions*

I planned with the participants to hold a meeting to introduce the project in more detail, begin the process of gaining official consent from those who had not already given it and, hopefully, establish rapport before starting the project. After considering all of the available spaces on campus, I decided to reserve a small classroom. Other spaces - such as the study rooms in the library and the lounge spaces - were either too small or too public. Neither did I want to use my office, since it would reinforce the teacher-student dynamic, which I hoped to avoid. The small classroom provided a space small enough to feel intimate, yet large enough for

everyone to sit comfortably and for me to set up the recording equipment. I arranged the initial meeting, but only four of the six participants came on time (Yuko, Ayuka, Akari and Arisa); Wakako came at the end but missed the explanation and Yamato had a cold so didn't come at all, so I arranged a second pre-sessional meeting with Wakako and Yamato.

The session proceeded as follows. As would become my custom, I arrived at the classroom 20 minutes early to set up the tables and chairs in a manner that I thought would be conducive to a collegial atmosphere (photo can be seen in the vignette presented in figure 3.2). The participants arrived one at a time and we shared small talk until it became clear that Wakako and Yamato would not be coming, after which I took them all to a drinks' vending machine to buy them a drink of their choice. This would become the norm for all following sessions. I told them that, since this was not a class, we could relax and enjoy ourselves. They seemed to appreciate the sentiment and it set a more casual tone. Once settled back in the room, I explained, with the help of the workflow sheet (appendix 3.9), what we would be doing. They understood and seemed interested in the project. I also emphasised that this was merely a provisional plan and was open for negotiation at any point. Then I presented them all with a notebook and a 16GB memory stick, which I had bought for each of them. I said that these could both be used to create the multimodal research journal and for planning and constructing the multimodal narratives.

I went through the information and consent form (appendix 3.10). My main concern was to give them the choice of whether to remain anonymous, or to reveal their real identity and be publicly recognised for their work. I talked to them about the possible risks involved. I also sought consent to video and audio record all of our sessions, initially for the purposes of documentation, and if the data were to be used for any other purposes at a later date, separate consent would be sought. I gave them all the information and consent forms to take to fill out in their own time before the next session. A few days later, I met with Yamato and Wakako at the public tables outside the library, covering all the same points as in the previous session.

### 3.4.3.2 Induction session

Having gained consent from all participants to do so, I began to audio and video record all of our sessions. From this point on, I wrote detailed FNs, with photographs, of all of our sessions. These notes provide more detail than is necessary for the reader and word limits do not allow me to present them all. However, I present a sample as a vignette here as a way of sharing the lived experience of the inquiry process while simultaneously providing details of the induction session:



Photograph of the room after I had finished setting it up. The video camera was mounted on a tripod in the left-hand corner of the

As scheduled, the first meeting for the Qualitative Explorers was held today at 9:00. Other than Yamato, who didn't come or answer or even receive texts, everyone was in attendance. I spent a good couple of hours last night figuring out how to attach my Zoom H6 audio recorder to my Canon 5Diii camera and record sound through the H6 rather than the reputedly weak audio record function of the 5D. I got it all up and running,

did tests and practiced setting it up a number of times. In doing so, I wore down the battery on the camera, so I plugged it in to charge overnight. I got a nice early night, slept well, woke up well rested and relaxed, but I forgot to get the battery out of the charger and put it back in the camera! I got to my office and took all the stuff out before I realised. First error! Luckily, the previous afternoon I had prepared my camcorder as a backup, so that was ready to go. I thought I would take a separate soundtrack with my H6 and attach that to the video in edit. I went to the room 45 minutes early to set up the tables and chairs in a circle and set up the camera and the H6 (in case I got consent to use them). I then sat and watched the rain fall outside. The room was on the ground floor overlooking the inner campus, which has a nice lawn and some plum trees which have just come into leaf.

Akari arrived first, followed by Arisa, then Wakako, Ayuka and finally a rather wet Yuko. They all arrived within about 5 minutes of 9:00, but we had to hang around for 10 minutes while Ayuka tried to get in touch with Yamato. During this time we talked about what they had done over the Golden Week holidays: Akari had been up to Hirosaki with her friend to see the cherry blossom (Hirosaki is one of Japan's main spots for this); Arisa had worked in the restaurant every day (she's a baker in the Italian restaurant that I sometimes go to in the Aeon shopping centre); Wakako and Ayuka didn't have much to say about it, except Ayuka said she thought she was catching a cold. Yuko had organised a trip for the NLAU LGBT club to visit the Tokyo Rainbow Pride event, which included a parade from one part of Tokyo to another – this prompted me to talk about a school friend of mine who drives a rainbow taxi, and the gay pride pedestrian crossing lights in London. I wondered if I sensed a little discomfort in some of the participants in discussing this theme – I suppose it is common currency now, but perhaps I shouldn't assume that they are all completely comfortable about all topics. Then again it is not my job to censure the conversation – quite the opposite in fact: I want to facilitate open unrestrained conversation.

Anyway, after failing to get in touch with Yamato, I decided to start by visiting the vending machine and buying everyone a drink (except Akari who had brought one with her), in the spirit of making everyone relaxed and talkative, as well as showing my appreciation for their participation. Yuko and Arisa ordered coffee, Wakako ordered a Vitamin drink and Ayuka ordered Maccha Latte. We went back to the room where I read out the first item on my agenda: "talk about consent". Everyone gave permission to use their real names, record video and audio. They seemed somewhat disinterested in the issue really. I must keep track of potentially sensitive parts and get permission from them if I intend to use them for publication. After receiving permission, I set the camera going and attempted to set the audio recorder going in the middle of the circle of chairs (it later turned out that for some reason it hadn't worked). I noticed no change in the dynamic of the group after setting these devices going, perhaps they are used to being recorded.

I then introduced the next item on the agenda: Group Values. This was an idea that I took from Godden's (2016) Cooperative Inquiry. I told them that since this was as much their group as mine (in fact possibly more so), that I would like them to decide the group values by which they would conduct themselves. I gave the

example of Christianity's 10 commandments but told them that they need not be as severe as those. Yuko asked if respecting one another's opinions would be an appropriate point. I said that that would be a good starting point and told them that I would stand back a little and allow them to decide the values among themselves, with me just chipping in occasionally if I saw a need. Yuko took the lead and asked the group if they wanted to use the whiteboard. Wakako volunteered to do the writing and off they went. Yuko and Wakako seemed particularly at ease taking this role, the others seemed a little more reticent, although most of them did contribute and the atmosphere was very supportive and encouraging, with Yuko and Wakako giving encouraging comments about the contributions of the others.

While they were doing this, I sat at the back of the room writing my scratch notes. I noticed that I am a little uneasy scribbling notes while others are interacting around me. It is interesting that the examiners of my confirmation paper in Sheffield thought that scratch notes were less intrusive than recording devices, such as my H6 or video cameras. I suppose, in circumstances in which the participants are at risk in some way or have often felt under threat by the authorities, there would be suspicion of such devices, since they carry association with surveillance. It could be generational, or it could be specific to this environment, but it seems to me that these participants are quite comfortable with being recorded and it frees me up in the session to take in what is happening. At the time of writing the first draft of these notes (3-4 hours after the event) I feel that I can remember far more than is written in my scratch notes and that I may not even need to look at the video to recall everything. I think, as one of the examiners suggested in fact, that writing up my field notes immediately after the event might be the most effective way of recording the events of the fieldwork. Nevertheless, I am very glad to have the video data because what I consider worth recording now and what I don't is likely to change, and I now have the video record to refer back to. I also have the option of mining the video for quotes and when I eventually present this information, I could weave in some video footage. I really should record everything even if I only use 1% of it, it will be worth it.

Anyway, returning to the session, I prompted them only a couple of times in writing their group values. I asked them how they would reach a decision if they didn't agree, and they (mainly Yuko) responded that they would compromise. When asked what this meant exactly, they said it meant finding the middle ground. Yuko

made the point that failure to find the middle ground leads to war. I added in passing at the end that they might be able to decide by vote if they were unable to compromise. Finally, I suggested that they write down their Group Values on the participant sheet that I had given them at the start of the session. They were:

- Respect everyone's opinions
- Have fun!
- Share your opinion
- Be honest
- Don't interrupt when others are speaking
- Don't be late/absent without notice
- Help each other
- Don't read between the lines (this is a reference to the commonly perceived Japanese tendency to leave things unsaid and rely on each other's intuition to determine what is meant)
- Compromise when there are disagreements
- Don't hesitate to ask questions
- Communicate with each other

Figure 3.2. Vignette taken from a sample of FN1, to provide insights into the first stage of the participatory inquiry.

The stage was thus set for the participatory component of the project. The FNs from which this vignette was taken continued to document the setting up of the task of creating the MN, but this will be taken up in the next chapter. The FNs were the first of twenty-one that documented all of the sessions. In later chapters, I refer to these FNs in accordance with the session number that they documented; the above vignette, for instance, was an extract from FN1.



### 3.5 Conclusion

In addressing the primary question of how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of NLAU, this chapter developed a methodology to address the specific research questions that were informed by the literature review:

- How do NLAU students construct their identities in relation to the immediate and broader sociocultural, and physical context of NLAU?
- How do they exercise control over this process?
- What role do their histories play in these processes?

The development of the methodology was guided by the quality criteria of rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, meaningful coherence (with assumptions about the nature of the world, learner autonomy and ways of knowing, and the research questions that they informed), and ethicality.

The methodology took a qualitative ethnographic approach and generated data by means of the documentation of a participatory inquiry, involving six student Inquiry Group Members (IGMs). The participatory inquiry involved each IGM creating a Multimodal Narrative (MN) (presented and analysed in Chapter 4) that represented their experiences of learning in NLAU, which the group then analysed in a Collaborative Narrative Analysis (CNA). This led to insights into learner autonomy in NLAU, which were then extended through a Student-Led Inquiry (SLI) (presented in Chapter 5). The group drew on what they had learned to make recommendations to the administration (SR) on how to improve NLAU from the perspective of fostering learner autonomy. They finally wrote a Reflective Paragraph (RP) on their experiences of the research process. Videos (Vs) and Field Notes (FNs) of the sessions, all of the artefacts produced by the inquiry group, correspondence between I and the IGMs, and my own autoethnographic insights into NLAU life constituted the data of the inquiry. I analysed and interpreted all of the data in reference to literature on learner autonomy.

In the following chapters, I present the results of the methods described here and, in doing so, develop our understanding of learner autonomy in relation to NLAU, an autonomy-oriented university in Japan.

# Chapter 4 – Individual trajectories

## 4.1 Introduction

Here begins the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data resulting from the research methods described in the last chapter. The aim of this chapter is to address the question of how learner autonomy is manifested in the experiences of individuals in the context of NLAU, by means of examining the learning trajectories of the six Inquiry Group Members (IGMs). I present an account of the experiences of each IGM, drawing on their Multimodal Narrative (MN), videos and transcripts (Vs) of each Collaborative Narrative Analysis (CNA), Vs of other conversations relating to their trajectories, and my own autoethnographic reflections (ARs), based on my years as faculty member of NLAU and a long-term resident of Akita. The data were analysed, by means of the methods described in section 3.3.2.1, in reference to the secondary research questions:

1. How do NLAU students construct their identities in relation to the immediate and broader sociocultural, and physical context of NLAU?
2. How do they exercise control over this process?
3. What role do their histories play in these processes?

Findings were then interpreted in reference to literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and additional literature – particularly on research relating to identity – thereby developing the theoretical threads introduced in Chapter 2 in relation to data on the learning trajectories of NLAU students.

In presenting the accounts of the trajectories of each IGM, I attempted to preserve the voices of the IGMs as far as possible, while also addressing the research questions coherently, in adherence to the word limits of the thesis. This involved representational compromises. For instance, although the multimodality provided additional richness to the data, the resulting combinations of audio, video and images that contributed to the integrity of the message could not easily be presented within the text of this thesis.

Therefore, where necessary, I provide hyperlinks to the original artefacts (stored in my Dropbox) and take visual and linguistic extracts from these and the other data sources in crafting the accounts of the trajectories of the IGMs (who had consented to their use for this purpose, orally and in writing – see appendix 3.10 for written consent form, and I have blurred the faces of individuals in the photographs who had not consented for their use).

Before presenting the accounts of the trajectories of each IGM, I situate the data from which I draw within the narrative of the inquiry process. The participants' first task in the inquiry, presented to them in the first session, was to create an MN of their trajectory through NLAU from the perspective of their learning and their control over it. Although I had spoken to the participants about the MN prior to the commencement of the project, I had provided them with no details, and I thought that providing the following written prompt would minimise the risk of confusion about the task:

“Reflect on your experience at NLAU, considering control over learning: times when you exercised it or failed to exercise it and experiences/factors/people/inspirations/moments that have been influential over your experience of control over learning, and collect or create symbols to represent them. You may focus on specific instances, you can think more holistically, or you may choose a mixture of the two. At this stage, the symbols should NOT include narrative or propositional prose, but may include poetry, verse or song words if you wish. The symbols can be in any other mode including, but not limited to, drawings, paintings, graphics, videos, sounds, music or 3D forms. At this stage, do not worry about how the symbols will fit together; they can be seemingly unrelated.”

The reason I decided to suggest that they work on the non-linguistic, symbolic aspects of their MNs first was an assumption that, since they were trained through their university education to express themselves in academic prose, unless they were explicitly steered away from this (initially at least), they would automatically reach for this mode of expression. Since I believed that the use of other modes would reveal aspects of their experience that could not be expressed in writing, I was keen to

broaden their representational repertoire. I gave them the prompt immediately after completing the group values (documented in section 3.4.3.2).

After confirming that they understood the prompt, I informed them that I would encourage them to interpret the meaning of “control over learning” in their own way. I also emphasised that I hoped they would consider not only learning in the classroom and academic learning, but in their life at NLAU more broadly. We set a deadline for the ‘symbols’ to be completed and Wakako suggested that we have a “half-way” meeting so they could share their ideas and “inspire each other”. We did this in Session 2. Then, in Session 3 the IGMs began to present their MNs and conduct their CNAs in accordance with the following prompt:

“The narrative analysis [CNA] will be done together as a group. The goal of the analysis is to identify the **ways** in which each person **exercised control over their learning** and what has **influenced** this. You are recommended to follow the steps below:

1. Take turns to present your narratives.
2. Everyone asks each presenter questions.
3. Identify the ways that they have exercised control over their own learning or instances where they failed to do so and write them on the white board.
4. Identify the influences in these instances/processes/experiences and write them on the board.
5. Everyone makes a note of what is on the board.”

During Sessions 3, 4 and 5, Ayuka, Akari, Arisa and Yamato presented their completed MNs to the group, who then collaborated to analyse them. As I mentioned in the last chapter, Yuko and Wakako decided that they were unable to complete their MNs until the following semester, due to competing commitments; and they were only present for the presentation and analysis of Ayuka’s MN (but they were present for later stages of this phase of the research). Because Yuko and Wakako participated in some activities in the first semester, they were considered, along with the others, to be part of Group 1, and the sole members of Group 2, who completed their inquiry in the following semester. Their MNs, therefore, belong to Group 2. I present my account of the IGMs’ trajectories in the order in which the MNs were presented and analysed in the sessions, beginning with Ayuka.

## 4.2 Ayuka's Trajectory

Ayuka's descriptions of her trajectory through NLAU revolve around her changing academic interests and future aspirations, resulting from her experiences while at NLAU. Study abroad in the US, her first experience as an immigrant and a member of an ethnic minority, had a profound effect on her identity and led to a clear life goal of helping immigrant children in her hometown. She then demonstrated a strong capacity for self-direction by taking decisive steps towards realising her goal.

Ayuka's MN consisted of a slide show created using Prezi, a presentation software that enables arrangement of elements (images or text) on a large 'canvas', into which, during presentation, the presenter can zoom in and out and pan between the elements. The canvas in Ayuka's MN was an overview screen, titled, "My Learning at NLAU". On the screen was a timeline, along which eight frames representing the stages of her learning were arranged, each containing words and/or images. This was accompanied by an oral commentary of her trajectory through NLAU. She initially presented it directly to the inquiry group in an interactive conversational style, and then later provided a recorded version that included additional points that arose during conversation in its original presentation ([click here to see the video of this MN](#)).

The account focuses on three salient aspects of Ayuka's trajectory: her initial interest in poverty, developing countries and the Israel-Palestine conflict (detailed in section 4.2.1); the significant impact of Ayuka's study abroad experiences on her identity and academic interests (detailed in section 4.2.2); and the realignment of her life plans resulting from her study abroad experiences (detailed in section 4.2.3). Throughout the account, I relate Ayuka's trajectory to the literature on identity construction, personal autonomy and learner autonomy.

#### 4.2.1 *“Maybe because I’m a Christian I’m interested in that area”: an interest in poverty, developing countries and the Israel-Palestine conflict*

In her recorded MN, Ayuka said the following:

“For my first semester, I was mostly studying English and academic writing in English, but my interests were in poverty and developing countries. We went to Vietnam as a study tour and volunteered at an orphanage. We also held a Fair-Trade Café at the school festival to support the orphanage.”

Then she said of the second semester the following:

“Through taking classes like Criminal Justice and International Relations, my academic interests shifted a little. I became more interested in international relations and racial conflicts, especially in the Middle East. I wanted to know more about the Israel-Palestine conflict, so I joined the Israel-Palestine student conference during the summer of my sophomore year. I made friends from Israel and Palestine and learned not only about the Israel-Palestine conflict, but also that we can understand each other personally, no matter how bad the diplomatic relationships between countries are. Before my study abroad, I decided my thesis topic as US foreign policy towards Israel.”

Although she did not attribute these interests directly to her religious beliefs during the recorded MN, the prominence of Christianity in other areas of her recorded MN and conversation revolving around her original presentation and the CNA suggest that her religion may, at least to some extent, underlie these motivations. There were a number of references to the bible club that she attended, and during the original presentation, Yuko asked her why she became interested in the Israel-Palestine conflict, she said: “eeh wakanai (*Japanese for “I don’t know”*)(*laugh*)... Maybe because I’m a Christian I’m interested in that area”. And later, during the CNA, Wakako observed that “her religious background was really important”, it was noted on the diagram (see figure 4.1), and Ayuka nodded in acknowledgement. Wakako also pointed out that all phases were

grounded in her desire to help the vulnerable and the oppressed. This would appear to be one of Ayuka's core values and resonates with the Christian values of compassion and charity. This could be considered a manifestation of her learner autonomy in two ways. Firstly, in reference to Sneddon's (2013) philosophy of personal autonomy, by making and acting upon choices on the basis of her values she is self-shaping (type 1) (the question of whether she chose these values is a question that will be taken up later). And secondly, by participating in the associated communities and their activities, Ayuka was constructing her identity on her own terms, which is an example of learner autonomy as conceived from the perspective of Situated Learning Theory (SLT) (Toohey and Norton, 2003).

During this period in her trajectory, she also emphasised the importance of the friends she had made. In her recorded MN, she said: "during my freshman year every day I was inspired by people from different countries and Japanese friends who have diverse backgrounds" and during the CNA she said that her friends "gave [her] a meaningful college life". She represents the social dimension of this period visually in her MN by using photographs with a heavy interpersonal emphasis, often depicting Ayuka smiling at the camera and performing a V-sign with her fingers (a ubiquitous pose in Japan, ostensibly a symbol of happiness), from a position within a unified group (see figure 4.2 for instance).

#### *4.2.2 "I experienced being a foreigner, or a minority in the country for the first time, and I felt that I was not included in American society": a change in perspective*

Ayuka's experiences on study abroad had a profound impact on her identity and her academic interests. In the oral commentary of the recorded version of the MN, she said:

"For my junior year I studied abroad in Mississippi, in the US. This study abroad experience changed the course of my life. I had a lot of fun to experience American culture and talk with American students and other international



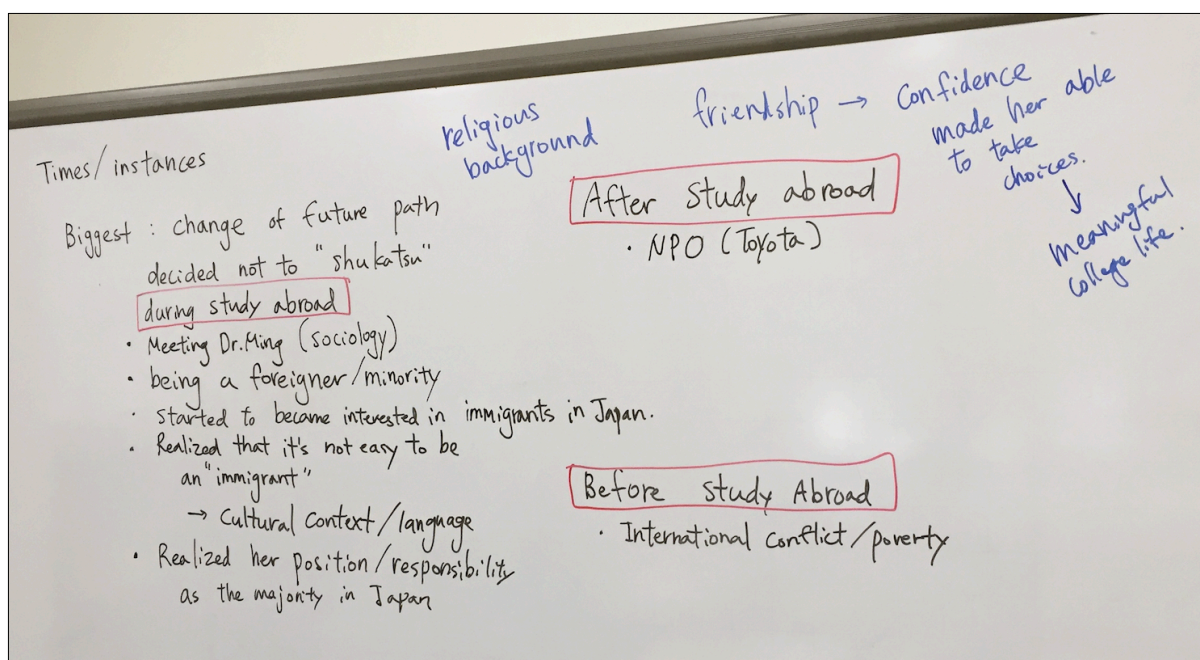


Figure 4.1. Outcome of the inquiry group's CNA, written on the whiteboard

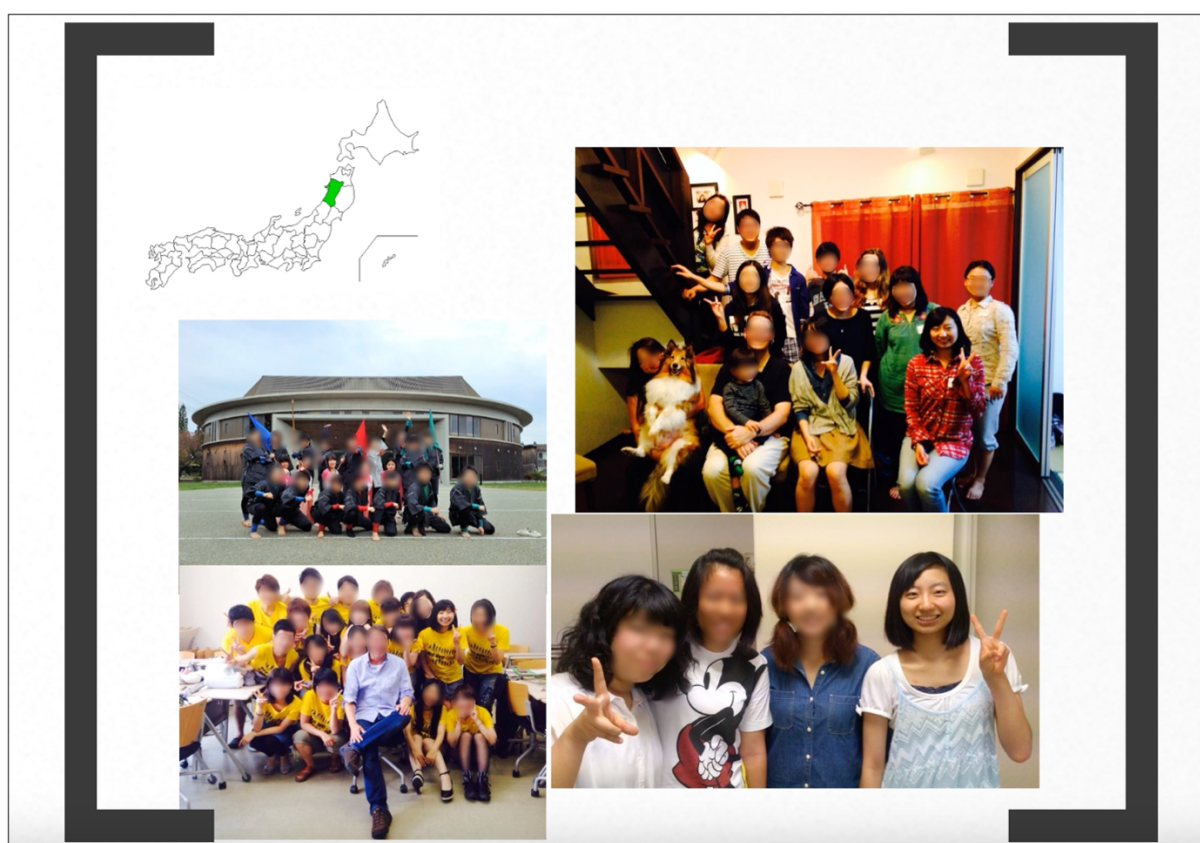


Figure 4.2. Prezi slide from Ayuka's MN, representing her first year at NLAU.

students at school. I was able to make wonderful friends. On the other hand, I experienced being a foreigner, or a minority in the country, for the first time, and I felt that I was not included in American society. I was the only Japanese at school and I thought I was different from others. Not only my English was bad, but also, I did not know how I could join in conversation with American friends. How they communicate was different from how Japanese do, and I realised that being an immigrant was not simple.”

The photographs that Ayuka used to represent this phase of her trajectory reinforce the impression of alienation suggested in her oral commentary (see figure 4.3). In contrast to the photographs she used to represent her first year (figure 4.2), these photographs give the impression of a diminished social life: there are none of the intimate photos that characterised the earlier phases, and of the six photographs used, only one contained people (and it was a relatively formal group portrait), while the other five depicted university buildings and facilities and were entirely devoid of people. This gave a sense of loneliness that was not expressed in the words of her oral commentary.

In Block’s (2007: 20–21) terms, Ayuka’s study abroad could be described as a “critical experience”: a period in one’s life in which any sense of a stable identity that one might have had is upset, prompting a struggle to find balance, resulting in the transformation of one’s identity. Critical experiences commonly arise, Block (2007) points out, when an individual crosses geographical and sociocultural borders. Indeed, Ayuka felt unable to successfully participate in the sociocultural context she found in the university in Mississippi, which was a stark contrast to the central place she enjoyed in her communities prior to her study abroad. In reconciling this situation, she appeared to use her Japanese national identity to explain her difficulties, which enabled her to identify as an excluded immigrant minority.

Ayuka’s academic learning, while on study abroad, enabled her to better understand herself from a sociological perspective. In the recorded MN, she said:





Figure 4.3. Images that represent Ayuka's study abroad.



Figure 4.4. Images representing Ayuka's time volunteering at the Toyota plant.

“Although I was still interested in peace building from the perspective of international relations, I was fascinated by the classes of sociology. Learning sociology was looking at inequality in society. I liked the way they taught about racial relations and the history of discrimination against minority in the US. I also liked the small sized classes. Except for the introduction class, sociology classes had only two to four students. I was in Jackson, Mississippi, and it was where the slavery system persisted for a long time. Living in the Deep South, I was able to see the racial gap in and outside school. The population of black students in my inequality and minorities in the US, I came to be interested in the racial minority in Japan.”

According to the original presentation of her MN, one result of understanding the racial dynamics of Jackson and her identification as ethnic minority was that she changed her church from a predominantly white church, in which she felt unwelcome, to a predominantly black but ethnically diverse church, in which she was more comfortable. During the CNA, Yuko and Ayuka identified revelations associated with her study abroad as the most significant point in her trajectory (as can be seen in figure 4.1). Yuko said: “I think this was the biggest change, the way that you perceive the world changed because you became a minority, right? And that’s why you became interested in Japanese immigrants” and she wrote, “you realised your position/responsibility as a majority” on the board, after confirming with Ayuka.

What is salient in the extract above is the role that knowledge played in her efforts to re-stabilise her identity. As Mercer (1990: 43) points out, “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by doubt and uncertainty”. The doubt and uncertainty that Ayuka was experiencing and the struggle for balance made her amenable to what she was learning in her sociology classes and to relate it to her circumstances. This points to the importance of “egocentric knowledge” (Sneddon, 2013: 131) – knowledge of the world that we relate to ourselves - in increasing self-knowledge. In this case, relating sociological knowledge from the classroom to her own experiences of being an immigrant and a member of an ethnic minority enabled Ayuka to see her self from a sociological perspective. In doing so, she increased her knowledge of her social self

(Meyers, 2005), and since knowledge of the self – as the source of our motivations – underpins our autonomy, this suggests an increase in autonomy (Sneddon, 2013).

The new perspective that Ayuka gained from these experiences suggests a more objective view of herself and her context. According to the social semiotic analysis that I performed, this was represented in the visual elements in the latter phases of her MN (see figure 4.4). The oblique angle from which the photographs were taken and the lack of gaze from the participants in photographs (signifying a lack of interaction between the viewer and the viewed) remove the viewer (and the photographer) from the scene, representing increased objectivity in the way that she represented her experiences from her study abroad onwards (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Although Ayuka made no reference to this, it corresponds with the changes in perspective that she described orally.

#### *4.2.3 “Being inspired by their earnest efforts, I came to think that I wanted to help them as my career”: helping immigrants in Japan*

As noted above, Ayuka’s sociological perspective resulting from her experiences on her study abroad changed her perspective on her hometown. In the recorded MN, she said:

“After finishing study abroad, I came back to Aichi prefecture, where I was born and raised. Even though I should know well about my hometown, I did not know that Aichi has so many Brazilians, until I learned about minorities in the US and became interested in this topic. I decided to volunteer to help immigrants in my hometown. I knew that there were many foreign children who worked to earn money without compulsory education. So, I taught Japanese to immigrant children, in Toyota in Olympia organisation, and supported their study. Being inspired by their earnest efforts, I came to think that I wanted to help them as my career.”

Ayuka recognised the profound impact of her experiences on study abroad. At the beginning of the CNA, when trying to identify the most significant events in the MN, the following dialogue between Ayuka and Yuko ensued:

Ayuka: I think the biggest decision was the change of the seminar and the change of future path, not to go to the company that NLAU student usually go. The biggest decision was that I realised that I wanted to help immigrants in Aichi prefecture.

Yuko: So when exactly did you decide to do this? During your study abroad?

Ayuka: During study abroad, I decided... I thought I wanted to go to graduate school, because... Ah! That was because I heard from the [sociology professor], she was really nice and she helped me a lot, and she recommended me go to graduate school.

The self-knowledge gained on her study abroad in combination with her core values of compassion and helping the vulnerable and the oppressed, and her capacity for self-direction (evidenced throughout her trajectory), enabled her to define her life plan, which she had already begun to work towards. This is a strong instance of learner autonomy.

### 4.3 Arisa's Trajectory

This account of Arisa's trajectory through NLAU - after some initial struggles with learning English – focuses on the development of her academic interests which, driven by her attraction to rural life and informed by her study abroad in Norway and participation in a research project, evolved into a life plan of living in Akita and working for the sustainability of Akita's rural life.

Like Ayuka, Arisa presented her MN to the inquiry group, using Prezi for the visual elements. She did this in Session 4. The main canvas on which the elements of the presentation were arranged was titled "Academic History" and there were photographs and text arranged on a graph with two lines; one of which represented her motivation for her personal life and the other her motivation for her academic life. I asked her to provide me with a recorded audio but, due to technical issues, this was not possible. She

did, however, provide me with the Prezi file, so I was able to use the audio from my video recordings of the session to create a video similar to Ayuka's MN ([Link to Arisa's MN](#)).

The first major theme in this account was her lack of motivation to learn English, which is addressed in section 4.3.1. The next theme was her rejection of her hometown and attachment to Akita, described in section 4.2.2. Then section 4.2.3 describes Arisa's life plan of living in Akita and contributing to the lives of its people. All themes are discussed in reference to learner autonomy throughout.

#### *4.3.1 "This was not just focused on English but more broad topics, more broad learning because it's BE, so I was really motivated to learn": English was a hurdle*

Arisa was attracted to NLAU by the liberal arts curriculum, and although she enjoyed the socially orientated aspects of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program (as she represents in the images of her MN, see figure 4.5), she was not motivated to learn English. In her MN, she said: "I actually don't like to learn English, so I had a really hard time with English study. So that's why I was dis-encouraged by my learning in English". Once she reached the advanced English classes in the Basic Education (BE) program, she found it difficult to keep up and to meet the study abroad requirements. She said in her MN: "It was really hard for me because I don't like English classes. So, I went to the AAC (Academic Achievement Centre) for help and, also, I didn't meet the score for TOEFL, so I needed to study more for TOEFL or IELTS."

In addition to her struggles with English, she felt pressure to meet the requirements for study abroad quickly, so that she could graduate within four years. When Yamato asked her about academic difficulties, during the CNA, she answered that she had felt "oppressed by the pressure of study abroad", which had been mentally very difficult for her. However, these difficulties prompted her to take more responsibility for her learning, taking on additional tasks outside of the class curricula. She said that she had started going to the LDIC and AAC every day. Yamato asked if she thought that this

meant that she had become a more active learner. She said that she thought that she had, which would seem to indicate an increased level of learner autonomy in the more traditional sense of taking responsibility for one's learning and being proactive in managing one's study (Holec, 1980; Little, 1991, for instance).

Although she struggled with her English learning, she was motivated by the liberal arts curriculum. She said of the period after completing EAP, in her MN, "this was not just focused on English but more broad topics, more broad learning because it's BE. So, I was really motivated to learn. So the graph goes up (*referring to the motivation graph in the visual component of her MN*)". During this period, she had a French roommate and was taking French classes, so she enjoyed learning French. She also said that being in Akita was motivating for her, which is the focus of the next sub-section.

#### *4.3.2 "I think for me it is valuable to spend time in a rural area": rejecting her urban hometown and gaining an appreciation of nature and rural life*

Arisa came to appreciate Akita and rural life, in contrast to the megacity of Yokohama, her hometown, and she attributed this, in part, to her club activities. She said in her MN:

"So my club activity, like Kanto (the club that practices for participation in the traditional local festival) and I participated in student government. This was a heavy burden on my student life, but at the same time I feel like an attachment to Akita and I think for me it is valuable to spend time in a rural area. Because I'm from [Yokohama in] Kanagawa Prefecture and it's really complicated and hard to live. It was tough for me."

Although Arisa did not elaborate on this point (and she was, unfortunately, not available for further questioning after completion of the project), drawing on my observations of the Kanto club, Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of Communities of Practice (CoP) and Wenger's (1998a) modes of belonging, we can speculate about the processes involved in Arisa's affinity with Akita. The Kanto club is a CoP, in that it has a specific repertoire of practices, and members participate peripherally initially, but increasingly centrally as



they learn from more senior members and become competent in the practices. In terms of how this related to Arisa's attachment to Akita, I have observed that the Kanto team enjoys a degree of prestige and popularity among the student body - I have often noted the pride and confidence instilled in its members. And the festival, with its historical roots, competitive spirit and the spectacle of physical strength and dexterity of balancing the lanterns, attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city; it is central to Akita's cultural identity. Wenger's (1998a) three modes of belonging - 'engagement', 'imagination' and 'alignment' (as detailed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3) - may help to better conceptualise the relationship between Arisa's increasingly central participation in the Kanto team and her attachment and subsequent dedication to the broader community of Akita. Through her *engagement* in the activities and interpersonal life of the team, she learned about the place of the festival in Akita's history and culture, which enabled her to *imagine* her place in the broader sociocultural context: the more central her participation in the club became, the more she felt to belong in Akita, which led to her *alignment* with the enterprises of the Akita community (which I discuss in the next subsection).

During the CNA, she reiterated her dislike for her hometown and her attachment to Akita. She said that although she loved and missed her family, she disliked her intensely urban hometown stating that she was happy to leave the stress behind. Neither did she identify with people who were happy and proud of living there: "I don't like people who say, "I'm from Yokohama"; I dislike that", she said. She mostly, however, emphasised her appreciation of Akita and rural life. She said that she liked the warmth of Akita's people.

It also seems that a general appreciation of nature might lie behind Arisa's affinity with Akita. She said of her study abroad, in her MN: "I was in Bergen, which is the second largest city in Norway, but there is so much great nature in the city area. I felt really comfortable with that. And I think that the variety is a really valuable thing for the quality of life". And in the CNA, she said that outside of the dorms, everything was expensive, so it was hard to find entertainment like bowling or karaoke that they could afford, so they enjoyed nature, like going to the mountains, the river or the sea to refresh.

### 4.3.3 *“I want to contribute to Akita people’s life”: investing in Akita’s future*

Arisa’s attachment to Akita led her to dedicate herself to a career there. She said in the CNA:

“I want to contribute to Akita people’s life, in two ways: one is researcher, and life examine people’s life and sometimes give advice to government or manager; and other is to work for the local government, the Akita prefecture government, so that I can contribute to the decision-making process of making policy and reflect people’s opinions directly.”

Although the intent to develop her career in Akita remained consistent, the issues on which she intended to focus evolved through her learning at NLAU. She said during her MN:

“First, I was interested in community development, and was more focused on cultural perspectives, like extinction of traditions, like Namahage [a local mythical monster], or Kanto [the local festival]. The number of people who participate in those festivals is decreasing and I thought, “too bad”, so I thought about that first. Then I heard it is because of depopulation or loss of young people, or it means like aging society. And also like a marginalisation, in Japanese *enkaishugoku*. And I think, I want to solve these situations, so I reached sustainability through them. So, to solve these situations, I think the welfare system is really important to sustain people’s life satisfaction. And also, in Norway, I saw that supporting women is really important, through mobility or the welfare system. So, gender theory is another interest for my current learning. So, I am thinking to combine these three factors in a master’s course.”

Arisa’s interest in welfare systems and equality developed in Norway. She said of her study abroad, during the CNA:



“I experienced lots of things [on study abroad]. And my focus in my learning was welfare because Norway has one of the most advanced welfare systems in the world. And, also, I learned some Norwegian language and culture and law. I also interacted with Norwegian people. I also felt some equality between genders, and people are kind to women and children, and there are also many classes and races, but people treat them equally. I was really surprised about that.”

Ayuka asked, during the CNA, whether she thought that if she hadn't gone to Norway, she would have different interests. Arisa thought that she probably would; she thought that she would probably just have focused on “Akita's cultural part and think about working in a local government job”. This is reflected to some extent in the diagram drawn on the whiteboard during the CNA (see figure 4.6), in the different interests written below “Akita” and “Norway”, and the red star next to “study abroad (social system)” written below “what affected control over learning”, on right of the board.

Arisa's interests developed further through her participation in a Project Based Learning (PBL) program. In her MN she said:

“I spent one year in Norway and Europe and then came back to Japan, and in winter I participated in a PBL in Gojome [a rural community outside of Akita City]. It was about mobility in rural areas, especially focused on depopulation and aging society. That's why it was based in Akita. It was a kind of collaborative research project, so besides NLAU we had students from Tokyo University, Lund University and the United Nations University. It was a very advanced atmosphere. Very professional. So, it was so hard for me catch up with sometimes. But I got some sense of research. We used some visual materials in our results. And I enjoyed some food in Akita. It was really academically hard, the course was like a 400 level, but it motivated me and stimulated me highly, and it led to my motivation towards a master's course currently.”

Participation in this PBL enabled Arisa to imagine being a researcher and led to her decision to pursue graduate education.

If we interpret Arisa's participation in the PBL program, her subsequent realignment of her interests and her commitment to go to graduate school from the perspective of Lave and Wenger's (1991) CoPs, she was on an "inbound trajectory" (Wenger, 1998a: 154) – a trajectory that holds the potential for full participation - into the 'research CoP'. Through her experiences on the project, she participated peripherally in an authentic research project, which motivated her to pursue a graduate education that would enable her to participate in this CoP more centrally. If we relate this 'researcher trajectory' with her trajectory into the broader community of Akita, being able to *imagine* her place in Akita in more specific terms would seem to enable Arisa to *align* with the broader enterprises of Akita on her own terms. Arisa's identity trajectory appears to be a result of choices that she made on the basis of her evolving values; and the relevant values – those relating to her preference for rural life – appear to be a result of autonomous choices: enrolling in NLAU and participating in the Kanto team, for instance. Arisa's definition of a life plan and her endeavours to realise it, like Ayuka, are an instance of self-direction and, by association, learner autonomy.

#### 4.4 Yamato's trajectory

This account of Yamato's trajectory documents his struggles to become what he defines as the 'typical NLAU student'. This required him to become fluent in English, to know what he wants to do in the future, and, to achieve both of these, he believed he must overcome his fear of failure, and become an "active learner".

Yamato represented his experiences visually by means of PowerPoint, accompanied by an oral presentation in Session 5. The PowerPoint included slides of four kinds. There was a process diagram that described his entry into NLAU and his progression through the three phases of the curriculum - EAP, BE and then GS. There were slides with bullet points, which appeared to represent the concrete/objective aspects of his experiences, such as dates, events, elements of the curriculum and people with whom he engaged. He represented his subjective experiences by means of photographs of handwritten diary extracts. The final kind of slide was word clouds, resulting from a word frequency

analysis of his diary extracts, which appeared to be a reification of his subjective experience. These were underlaid by shapes that he said were symbolic of the phase that they described – a baby, a child, a fist and a brain. Then, overlaying the visual components was his oral narration, which gave the multimodal ensemble coherence and, in many cases, paraphrased, elaborated or commented on the visual representations ([link to recorded version of Yamato's MN](#)).

The account emphasises three aspects of Yamato's trajectory, which relate to the construction of his identity. These are: Yamato's perception of a gap between what he considered to be the typical NLAU student and himself (described in section 4.4.1); his efforts to close this gap (in section 4.4.2); and the ambivalence he experienced during this process (4.4.3).

#### *4.4.1 "I feel that everyone has certain levels of English ability": recognising the gap*

The following diary extract, taken from his MN, describes Yamato's state of mind immediately after arriving in Akita, waiting for classes to begin.

"I have decided to join the diversity club because it seems fun to interact with many different people, with various background.

But at the same time, I am a bit worried that people will look at me as if I am a weird person. Since I came to Akita, I am in a strange mood. While feeling excited in this new environment, I am also very afraid of losing my confidence in English ability. I have always considered myself as a competent student, I always thought I could do anything easily without intensive efforts. I always scored good results in English exams, even though I did not study so hard.

But here, I feel that everyone has certain levels of English ability. I have met some people who have experienced overseas life. Am I going to experience 挫折感 [zasetsū – a feeling of failure] for the first time in my life here at NLAU?

Am I going to feel that I am inferior to others here?

At the moment, I am making the best effort I can to convince myself that I am doing well here.

The biggest feeling I am holding right now is “anxiety”, in a negative sense, I think.”

In moving from his high school, where he “always considered himself a competent student”, to NLAU, where he worries that people are better able to communicate in English and have more international experience than him, the contrast that he perceives between himself and those around him, throws his identity into the light: like Ayuka, in moving from one place to another, he had a “critical experience” (Block, 2007: 20–21). The ambivalence that characterises such critical experiences was constituted, initially, in his excitement at being in the novel environment, on the one hand, and, on the other, anxiety caused by his fear of failure and losing the confidence in his English that he had perhaps taken for granted in his high school days. The term “zasetsu”, used above, he defined in his original presentation of the MN as the first failure after always being successful. He describes similar ambivalence in his account of his first EAP lessons, in which he was again struck by contrast: between the classroom environment he was used to and that of NLAU. He reported “feeling both excite[d] and afraid”, describing struggles, but also anticipation of enjoying the challenges.

Following the initial impressions described in the diary extract above, he described encounters that realised his fear of ‘zasetsu’. Yamato ascribes great significance to his first encounter with Yuko (the IGM), who was the president of the diversity club he joined, which he described in the following diary entry:

“I attended the first meeting of the diversity club. When I entered the classroom, I felt a little bit relieved because I found many Japanese students (at least they looked so) there. The president looks Japanese, and it makes me feel calmed down.

BUT once she started talking, I'm really surprised overwhelmed by her English. She's so fluent and I cannot understand what she's talking about. I feel so disappointed because of two reasons. One is that I wanted her to "not good" at English that much. I realise that I am hoping that people do not have high English ability because I don't want to feel inferiority. The other reason is that I simply could not understand her speech because of my awful listening ability. How I deal with this situation (that I cannot understand what she's talking about) is just pretend that I understand what she is saying. It's too embarrassing for me to ask for second explanation, so I just pretend good English user. I'm again losing my confidence, but also I can push myself to learn English very hard. This the only positive thing from today."

This vindication of his fears reified his identity of "non-participation" (Wenger, 1998a: 165) in relation to the 'NLAU student CoP', characterised by fluency in English, as Yamato perceived it at this time. An identity of non-participation, as Wenger (1998a) conceives it, entails the possibility of either striving to participate more centrally, or of becoming marginalised: of being prevented from full participation. In the closing statement of the diary entry above, in which he resolves to "learn English very hard", he indicates that he wants to strive to participate more centrally, placing himself on an inbound trajectory into the NLAU student CoP.

#### *4.4.2 "So, I guess I am trying to fix my personality": Yamato's inbound trajectory*

Yamato differentiated himself from other NLAU students not only in terms of his English, but also in terms of attitudes. However, as with his resolve to better his English, he also strives to better align his attitude with that of his perception of the 'typical NLAU student'.

From the beginning of the MN through to the end of the group's analysis (including the diary extracts above), he constructs a "discourse identity" (Gee, 2000: 100) – identity



constructed through (d)iscourse about the kind of person we are - of himself in contrast to what he deems the typical NLAU student, who is proactive, passionate and “not afraid of making mistakes”, but also his efforts to become more like this. This begins when he describes the circumstances by which he came to be an NLAU student, at the start of his MN:

“So, first, at the very beginning of my time at NLAU, ahhh, it was not me that decided to come to NLAU. My teacher back in my high school recommended me to come to NLAU, and also, since I forgot to send my application sheet to the administration, I needed to come to Akita by myself and fill out my application sheet and submit. So, the entrance ceremony was my [not] first visit to Akita.”

He lamented, later, during the CNA that he “was always relying on other people about deciding [his] life”, and he ascribed this to his fear of losing confidence. He said, “I didn’t take any concrete action or active decision making so I didn’t have to face any difficulties [...]. All I know is I am a chicken”. During the conversations about Yamato’s MN, the term “active learning” came up frequently, suggesting that the (d)iscourse of the ‘typical NLAU student’ in contrast to which Yamato identified himself may have, at least in part, arisen from the institutional discourse (a term I am using to describe the values and policies of institutions that are communicated through documents and through the speech of figures of authority) that describes the “NLAU Spirit” (NLAU, 2021b) as having “a strong sense of purpose [...], a strong will to follow their own path and learn at their own initiative” and the “free will to act as well as the capacity to judge”. This ethos is propagated in official documentation, orientation events, the speech of teachers and to varying degrees embodied by the students. Yamato’s construction of his discourse identity in contrast to the “NLAU Spirit”, but also his desire to be like this, along with the reasons why he has found it hard, were made salient during the CNA:

Yamato: My image of most NLAU students are... I think students in this university are passionate and people make so many challenges, they are so active... so I always felt like I was in the opposite position  
(*bashful laugh*)

Arisa: Do you wanna become the active or passionate people?

Yamato: (*pained expression*)... ahhh.... (*long pause*)... yeah, I think I wanted to be more active, but because I never wanted to, you know, lose confidence, I guess I couldn't take action.

Despite this contrasting discourse identity, as with regards to his English ability, Yamato also positions himself on an inbound trajectory in the NLAU student CoP in terms of his attitudes. He said during the collaborative analysis, "so, I guess I am trying to fix my personality" and "after coming here... I don't know when my attitude started to change. I want to believe that I have changed". This change is evidenced in a number of ways that mark his inbound trajectory in relation to the NLAU community, which are described below.

We can see evidence of his peripheral, but inbound participation in the NLAU student community in both his social and his academic life. The following diary extract, about his second year, is an example of his inbound social trajectory:

"I'm living in Komachi Hall for one year, and I think my life is going pretty well so far.

Besides my roommate Kazuki, I often (almost everyday) talk with some other friends. And two of them have really high English ability. One is from Pakistan and the other person is from the Philippines. They say they started learning English at primary school while they lived overseas. They sometimes chat with each other in English, and we (me, my roommate and other Japanese friends) cannot understand what they are talking. I really desire to join in that conversation, with my fluent English, but at the moment I know my English is like baby's level. I sometimes feel it's unequal that some people have high English ability thanks to prior experience in foreign countries, while others do not. One night we gathered in our room watching a stand-up comedy show. It's really fast, too fast for us but the two were enjoying the comedy. The huge gap in English, between "us" and "them", became so obvious now. I really want to be fluent in English."

Although he continued to be dissatisfied with his level of English and compared himself unfavourably to the exchange students, he seemed satisfied with his social life. There is no mention of the anxiety that he previously felt, perhaps because he came to distinguish between the Japanese NLAU students, “us”, and the international students, “them”, and found the ‘Japanese NLAU student identity’ more achievable. His previous encounter with Yuko was distressing because he made no such distinctions at that time (I should note here that although Yuko is a Japanese degree-seeking student, since she spent a significant portion of her childhood living in the US, she is not the “typical NLAU student”; more will be said about this when discussing Yuko’s MN in section 4.7). At that time, he was aware of his “institutional identity” (Gee, 2000: 100) (an identity ascribed by an institution) as an NLAU student – in that he was a matriculated, ‘card-holding’ student - and, to him, Yuko embodied what that meant and he saw that he fell short. However, he found solidarity with other Japanese students who struggled to communicate in English, which, perhaps, relieved his sense of inferiority and anxiety. Although English continued to pose a problem for Yamato, he developed strategies for dealing with this, such as relying on his more fluent friends in class.

Constructing an identity as a ‘Japanese NLAU student’ did not, however, limit Yamato’s social life to this group. Indeed, he maintained friendships with international students, relying on the previously mentioned Filipino friend to help him to follow his sociology classes in which the teacher spoke too quickly for him, for instance. In the original presentation of his MN, he also spoke of his “Japanese Society” class, which he described as a “turning point [...] because [he] used to hate going out with people and talking with people”, but in this class he “met so many people from different countries and cultures and [...] made good friends”. He made a close friend from the Czech Republic in this class, who later influenced his decision to study abroad in Maastricht University. It could also be said that befriending international students is part of the “practice repertoire” (Wenger, 1998a) of the NLAU student CoP of which Yamato was becoming a member. However, this suggests a level of calculation that I feel is unwarranted, and I would argue (along with Anthony and McCabe (2015)) that friendship is a form of identity work in its own right. Regardless of his motives, given Yamato’s reported lack of confidence in English communication, this suggests a level of motivation that

contradicts his proclaimed “passive and lazy” attitude. My own experience suggests, after all, that this willingness to engage with the international students is not universal among NLAU students.

There is other evidence to suggest that Yamato developed an attitude more similar to his conception of the proactive, passionate ‘typical NLAU student’. One example of this transformation was his change of approach to his classes. In the first semester of BE, he explains in one his diary entries: “What is bad about my course choice is that I just picked some easy-looking classes. I know I should choose courses that attract my academic interest. But at the moment I don’t have any specific field I’d like to explore”. This led to the following situation, as he explained in the original presentation of his MN: “When I was taking BE classes [in the first semester], I was feeling like I was just going to classes and sitting there for one hour and listening to the teachers and just nodding”. This, however, began to change as a result of experiences within the NLAU curriculum (see figure 4.7 for the word cloud of this period that Yamato included in his MN). Firstly, Yamato had been fascinated by archaeology in his early teens and this interest was rekindled by his geography teacher who often spoke of ancient civilisations (spring semester, 2016) and was consolidated in the “World Civilisations” course that he took the following semester. He said, “I rediscovered my academic interests after coming to NLAU”, which gave him focus in his studies and informed his choice of study abroad institution, his graduate paper topic and a decision to pursue graduate studies on graduation from NLAU. During the CNA, the group agreed that defining his interests was a major instance of controlling his learning. Secondly, in the fall semester, 2016, he took a course in programming principles, which, in one of the diary entries in his MN, he described as his “[b]iggest influence and inspiration”. He explained this in the original presentation of his MN:

“I took Programming Principles, taught by professor (*name omitted*). He is the [...] professor, who specialised in Data Science. And in programming principles class, we were supposed to do our own project, we were supposed to make our own application, using some programming languages. And... it was the most difficult class for me after coming to NLAU because programming was something

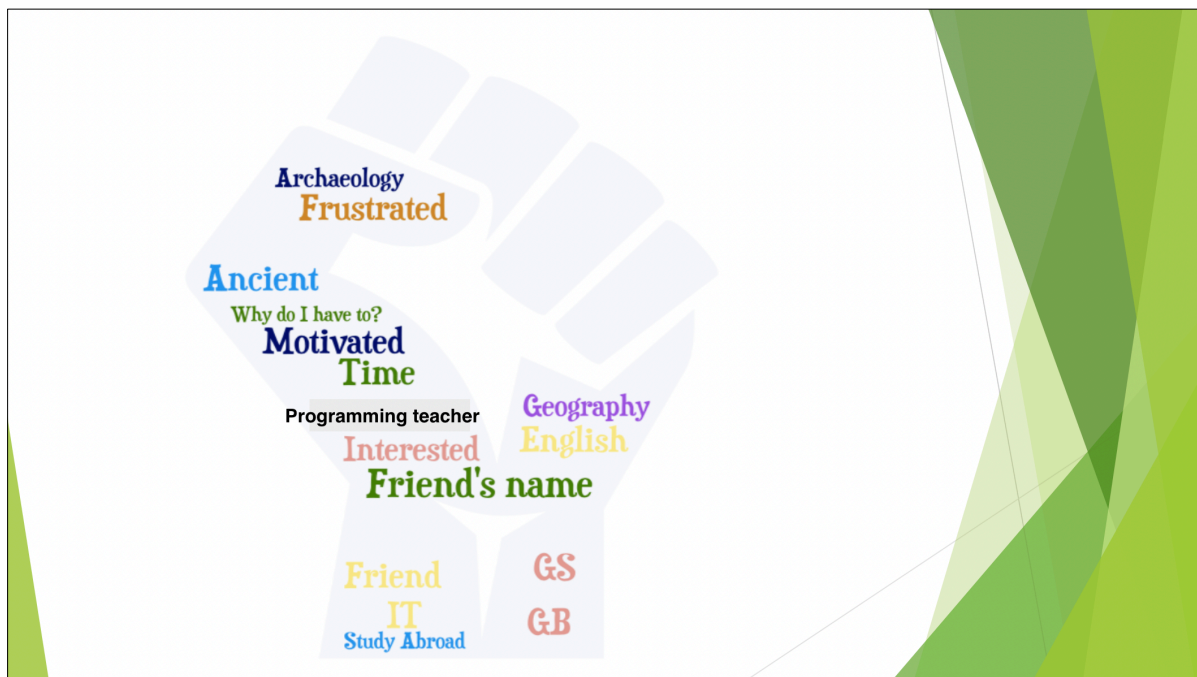


Figure 4.7. Word cloud of Yamato's experiences in the BE program

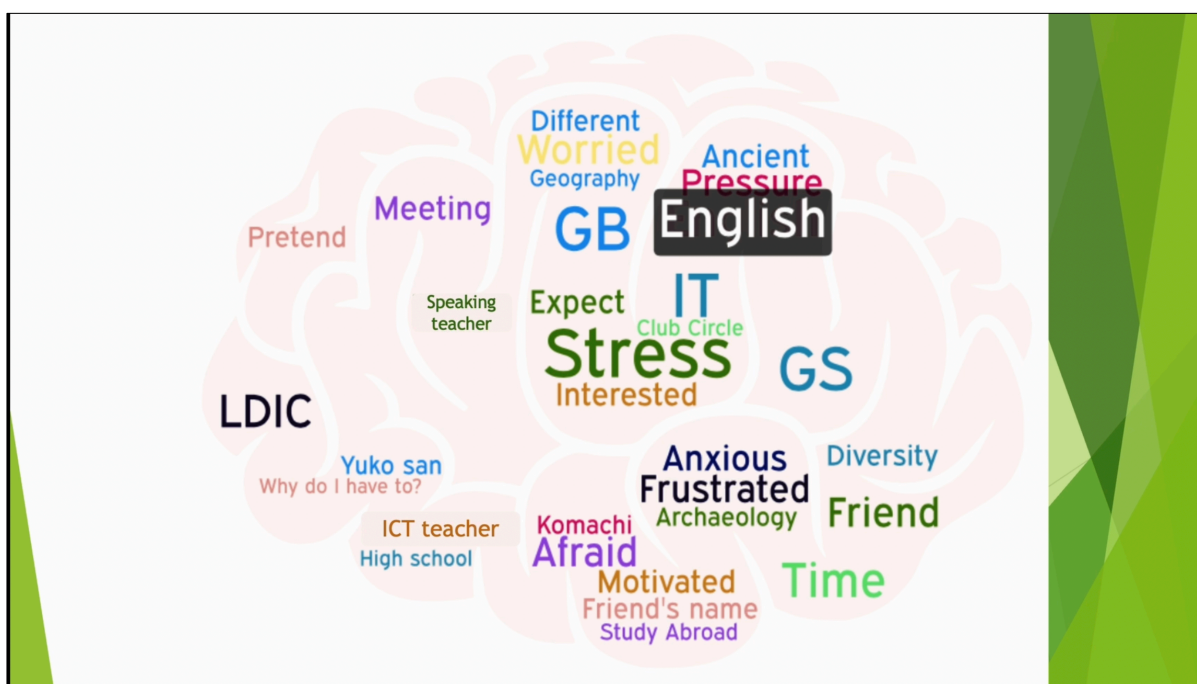


Figure 4.8. Yamato's word cloud of his experiences at NLAU

new to me, and I spent so much time in the IT lab every day. And sometimes I didn't go back to my room for one and a half days: I was living in the IT room. But professor (*name omitted*) taught me how to deal with frustration and how to *enjoy* difficulties you face in your academic career. And, in this class, when the computer was not working well, he didn't get angry, he was like "oh, this is interesting". He seemed like he was enjoying everything. And so I was really inspired by him and that's why I am taking his other class this semester."

The teacher of this course also held NLAU's first "hackathon", in which Yamato was a participant. He described the event in the following diary extract:

"[...] In the event, student, professors, and employees from Soft Bank got together in some groups and discussed a variety of things about information technology. [The teacher] encouraged us to be brave enough to share our ideas with adults. In this event, I could know professors' different faces which we cannot see in their classes. It was interesting to see professors having active intense conversations with each other. The programming class taught me an important lesson: I need to pick up the chance to learn by myself, for there are always many sources to learn. And learning is not a passive activity. Instead, it is more free, self-responsible process in which we can enjoy struggles. [The teacher] gave me the ability to enjoy difficult situations, which is very useful in my student life."

The valuable lesson that Yamato speaks of at the end of the diary extract above sounds very much like definitions of learner autonomy found in the early learner autonomy literature (Holec, 1980; Little, 1991, for instance); and the new found ability to "enjoy struggles" that he describes suggests that he had, at least to some degree, overcome his fear of failure that had previously prevented him from embracing challenges.

Resonating with this, he later said, "I am trying to make challenges and I'm trying to put myself into stressful environments; for example, I used to love to sit down at the back of the classroom, because it makes me feel comfortable, but now I am trying to sit down at the front". In embodying these (modest) changes, he was aligning more closely with NLAU's institutional discourse of the "active learner" and he has also succeeded in

becoming more the “typical NLAU student” like whom he aspired to be. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the rediscovery of his interest in archaeology assisted in this, being a form of self-knowledge that enabled him to better self-direct.

The role of the social context in both the development of his metacognitive approach to learning and finding his academic focus is clear. His experiences in the programming class contributed to his transformation by demonstrating an alternative way of being, to which Yamato aspired. By observing his teacher’s approach to problem solving, Yamato felt that he had been able to adopt an attitude and learned some of the metacognitive skills necessary for academic success. In this, we could say that Yamato’s programming teacher is the “more capable other”, who helped Yamato to move through the “Zone of Proximal Development” (Vygotsky, 1978). Observing the professors and professionals interact showed him, more holistically, a way of being that he aspired to; in Taylor’s (1991) terms, Yamato’s “horizons of significance” expanded. In terms of finding his academic focus, he attributed his geography and “world civilisation” classes. This more active participation in both his academic and social life constitute more central participation in the practices that constitute the ‘NLAU student CoP’, as defined by Yamato earlier in his MN.

#### *4.4.3 Reconciling conflicting identity trajectories*

It would be a mistake to consider Yamato to have embodied a stable ‘NLAU student identity’: there was ambivalence evident throughout his MN and the subsequent CNA. The word cloud that is a holistic visual representation of his time at NLAU shown in figure 4.8 appears to emphasise the negative emotional dimension of his experiences. Particularly in his social life, he seemed to oscillate between being socially active and being somewhat isolated. Above, he spoke of socialising with his friends, but during the CNA, he said “after leaving Komachi dormitory, I started to live in the single room, and I don’t go out of my room (*everyone laughs*). I really do not talk with people, even Japanese”.

This ambivalence could be explained by Wenger’s (1998a) notion of identity being a process of reconciling multiple identity trajectories, referring to identities developed in

relation to the multiple CoPs that one encounters (either identities of participation or non-participation) throughout one's life (often simultaneously). These pre-existing identity trajectories are not replaced by the new ones that we develop as we engage with new CoPs; they continue to be a part of us and need to be reconciled with the new identity trajectories that we embody. This is often a source of ambivalence and may explain the anxiety and sense of inferiority described in relation to the transition from Yamato's previous life to his NLAU life: he brought the identities that he had developed through his successful participation in his 'high school student CoP' and his entire life prior to NLAU and these conflicted with the new identity he felt he must develop to fully participate in the 'NLAU student CoP'. This could underlie the oscillation between attempting to be proactive and sociable and regressing to being "passive and lazy" (his words). An example that personifies the reconciliation of these conflicting trajectories can be found in one of the diary extracts that he included in his MN:

"I wanted to apply for early study abroad program, but it seems I have to give up on it. I scored enough in TOEFL Test, and I think my GPA is not so bad at the moment. But my girlfriend is not going to apply for study abroad program yet. We've been together since we were in high school. And I feel somewhat guilty since I know she decided to come to NLAU following me. I can't just say "bye" and leave for study abroad, and also I want to stay with her.

I am not mixing private and academic life, but this is the most important factor in my life so far. Since my first semester ended, my ex-roommate moved into the next door and I am living in the same room by myself. I feel I am having less communication with my friends these days, and in contrast, I'm spending more time with my girlfriend, while feeling happy staying with her, I'm worried if it prevents us from interacting other people. It's too bad if we only talk to each other and have few friends at NLAU. Also, it can prevent us from talking to international students, which is a great opportunity to practice English.

My concern will last as long as we are together, however this relationship comes before anything in my student life. I think this intimate relationship has both positive and negative impacts on our academic performance."



This example acts almost like an analogy for all the conflicting identity trajectories that Yamato had to reconcile when integrating himself into the NLAU student community.

## 4.5 Akari's trajectory

This account of Akari's trajectory tells of her struggles to become a peace scholar, of which NLAU was only a part and English learning was a means to that end. In Akari's representation of her experiences, this ambition and associated struggles had been central to her construction of her identity.

Akari presented her MN to the group in the form of a video that she had made using projecting equipment available in all classrooms ([click here to see Akari's MN](#)). She had stuck what appeared to be polaroid photographs, depicting significant aspects of her learning, into two blank notebooks. These two notebooks signified two halves of the narrative; the first described her efforts to learn English and the second described her efforts to learn about peace, an endeavour that she had pursued periodically since elementary school. She filmed herself writing brief notes in the books, in which she elaborated while narrating her story orally.

In this section, I first describe Akari's endeavours to become a peace scholar and the implications for the construction of her identity, before describing the ways in which this process was both constrained and enabled by her socio-historical context. Finally, I discuss her trajectory in terms of her control over the process of her identity construction: her learner autonomy.

### *4.5.1 "I have tried to deepen my understandings of peace individually": Akari's endeavours to become a peace scholar*

Akari's motivations for entering NLAU were to develop her English and to attain a bachelor's degree, both of which she learned were prerequisites for becoming a peace

scholar, she said during the CNA. However, as she said in her MN, she quickly became frustrated with NLAU's lack of courses specifically related to peace studies:

“Since NLAU doesn't provide any specific Peace Studies course, first I decided to transfer another university to learn it. This is one of the reasons I took a long absence for one year. Unfortunately, I couldn't pass exams, due to my English skills, but I had chances to learn about peace more deeply during long absence. Especially the class we're reading the bible, which is provided by Osaka Jogakuin College, where I graduate[d from]. It was really interesting! Thanks to the class, I could know the German artist during second world war. Since I love study and learn about peace and art, it was really fruitful for me.”

I will return to her failure to transfer to another university when examining the contextual constraints on Akari's ambitions, but for now, this episode could be seen as the starting point for her attempts to learn about peace outside of the NLAU curriculum. “I have tried to deepen my understandings of peace individually, so I tend to go everywhere to gain knowledge”, she said during her MN. Through photographs with written commentary and her oral narrative she represents herself as an active peace scholar. By representing her travels to events such as the “UN movie event in Yokohama”, meetings with prominent peace scholars, both Japanese and international, holding peace workshops in the local community (see figure 4.9 for an example of her visual representation of this), setting up an NGO with an NLAU faculty member and visiting sites of historical conflicts, she constructs a discourse identity as a peace scholar. She also performs this identity during the CNA, speaking about the geopolitics of Eastern Europe, where she intended to go for her study abroad. In addition, the experiences that she documents here also suggest that she was participating peripherally in the peace studies CoP. All the experiences she describes, including her friendships with people from around the world, are also framed within her ‘aspiring peace scholar identity trajectory’.

However, despite her commitment and apparent competence in these practices, she is not granted an institutional identity as a peace scholar: she is not an *authorised* peace

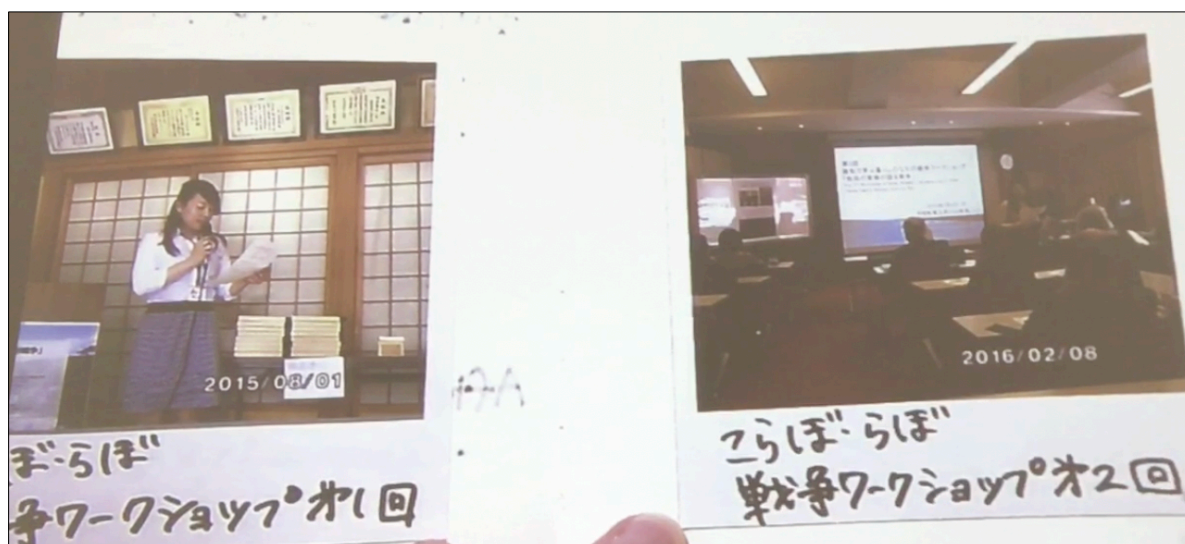


Figure 4.9. Screenshot from Akari's MN depicting the peace workshops that she organised with the help of an NLAU faculty member.



Figure 4.10. Screenshot from Akari's MN representing her perspective on her struggles to learn English at

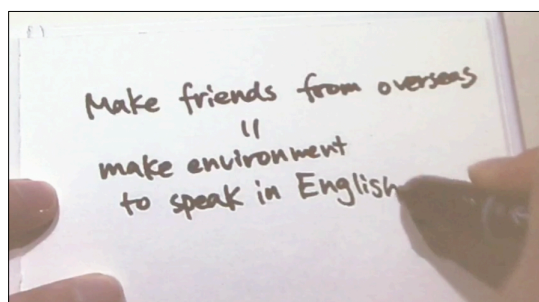


Figure 4.11. Screenshot of Akari's MN describing the role of international

scholar. This is problematic for her goals in two ways. Firstly, without the authorisation that an institutional identity affords, it may be difficult for Akari's discourse identity to be recognised and perpetuated by others (Gee, 2000). Secondly, unless she is granted a peace scholar institutional identity (whether an undergraduate peace studies student or someone with a job associated with peace studies), her time and attention will always be divided between peace studies and working to sustain herself, thereby constraining her capacity to participate in the peace studies CoP. The next subsection describes the barriers to Akari attaining an institutional identity as a peace scholar and her efforts to surmount them.

#### *4.5.2 "There was a really obvious glass ceiling": barriers to Akari achieving her ambition and her struggles to surmount them*

Akari encountered many barriers to achieving her ambition, but also showed great agency in attempting to surmount them. The barriers were sociocultural, socioeconomic and institutional.

The following extract from the transcription of conversations during the CNA provides insights into the constraining role that Akari's family played in her endeavours to be a peace scholar:

- Arisa: How do the people around you, especially your parents, react to your life events, like transfer university or traveling around Japan to seek your curiosity?
- Akari: My parents is...
- Arisa: Do you they support your academic focus or ..
- Akari: No. Since my father is a really conservative person... my mother is a kind of liberal person, but they don't go to university so they don't know what is the university itself and so... I always convince them after I did it. Before doing something, I never say something to them. Because they really worry [about] me – "can you really do this one?"

It must be really tough. Maybe you can't do this". They will say this, I guess. I didn't want to be... (*says something inaudible in Japanese*)

Yamato: Be interrupted?

Akari: Yes.

Yamato: Before you take action.

Akari: Yeah, yes. I never say anything.

The strategy described here, that Akari has developed to overcome the constraints put upon her by her parents, demonstrates her high degree of agency, and self-trust, in spite of her parents' apparent lack of faith in her.

The role of Akari's educational environment on her trajectory, while positive at times also constrained her. She developed an interest in issues pertaining to peace in her elementary school (I will return to this point in the next subsection), but her junior high and high school did little to assist in her endeavours to become a peace scholar. During the CNA, she said:

"In junior high, my junior high was so famous for bullying and at that moment it was really tough for me to think about that so, I almost forgot everything about this kind of interest because I had to survive in that environment. And then I went to the high school which really don't study. Every single student don't study... didn't study, so I had free time to think about peace and my future career, so I decided to go to my ideal two-year college."

Then she said:

"I went to a two-year women's college and the women's college curriculum is English education, society and civilisation and human life education, so this all related to peace and poverty so it accelerated to learn about peace, but [...] I had a reacti[onary] father and my family's financial background is not so good"

These two extracts show ways in which Akari was both constrained and enabled by her social context. The next extract from the transcription of the CNA describes her continuing efforts to learn about peace after starting to work:

“I decided to work, but during working I joined in a civil organisation that hold events to learn global cooperation so and I learned a lot from that organisation, but since my knowledge is like spots (*drawing spots on the board*), just spots – economy, politics, gender – they’re not connected. [...] I realise I need more practice or I have to study more. But since I only graduated from a 2-year college, there was a really obvious glass ceiling (*drawing on the board*), so I want to transfer other jobs like international development or cooperation or ..., but since everything requires a certain level of English and bachelor’s degree, or master’s degree, I decided to quit job and enter university again.”

As mentioned in the previous subsection, this need for both English communicative competence and a bachelor’s degree is what prompted Akari to enter NLAU. On arrival at NLAU, learning a sufficient level of English became her main frustration (see figure 4.10 for the visual representation of this experience). As a mature student (24 years old on entering NLAU), the English language entry requirements were lower than for other students. Akari’s TOEFL score, she points out in her MN, was 430 on entry to NLAU (most students score over 500), which led to a two-year struggle to reach the necessary 550 score. She said of this period:

“It was SOOO time consuming, but considering my first TOEFL score of 430 it can’t help. I understand. Throughout I learn English, I try to understand why I am not a successful language learner. So, since I took Applied Linguistics and Japanese Phonetics for my minor, it was really helpful to see my study objectively.”

She quickly became disillusioned with NLAU’s provisions for developing her English, so she sought alternatives, which included the use of self-study texts and visiting other universities. As was described in the previous section, her frustration with NLAU led her to attempt to transfer to another university, but this failed due to the English

component of the transfer exams that required her to translate passages from English to Japanese and vice versa, a skill which she lacked despite being communicatively proficient in English. These frustrations led to a degree of resentment: “people say English is just a tool, but I think English has too many roles and too big influence and power”, she said during the MN.

At times, she referenced her socioeconomic situation as the source of her frustrations. During the CNA, she said, “I wanna be a researcher, but er yes researcher, but my concrete concern is financial thing. I have a lot of student loan, so already I have to pay them, so (*hand movements suggesting juggling - laugh*)”, for instance. And, at times she also attributed her struggles with English to her relative deprivation, as in the following extract from the CNA transcript:

“I always have to face with my negative feelings. For example, some students have experience of living in foreign countries or have experiences of studying in foreign high schools because of their family backgrounds or something, but I couldn’t choose that way, so I simply envy them, really jealous!! But they can’t help so... when I feel negative feelings, when I can’t... when I meet or have difficulty, I always come back to my initial purpose or reason why I entered the university and why I have to learn and overcome. Not overcome, just go through.”

She mentioned this ‘meta-affective strategy’ (Oxford, 2011) of remembering her original purpose, when she struggled to persevere, numerous times throughout the MN and CNA; for example:

“When I feel sick and tired of studying I always take a break. And, also, I try to remember the reasons why I entered this university. It was necessary for my future career, so there’s no options”

#### 4.5.3 *“The luckiest thing in my life, is that I could meet a lot of good people”: ways in which Akari’s ambition was enabled by her social context*

While Akari was constrained by her socio-historical context, she was also enabled by it; by the peace-oriented (D)iscourse of the region in which she grew up, the curriculum of the education system of that region and people who she met through her civil engagement and her time at NLAU.

The positive (as well as the negative) influences of her education on her peace studies ambitions were mentioned above. I elaborate on these here and position it in the context of the regional agenda. Conversations during the CNA revealed that the curriculum of West Japan has a strong human rights emphasis, perhaps as a result of the war history of West Japanese cities such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Indeed, Akari attributes the genesis of her ambition to be a peace scholar to an elementary school project which facilitated independent research on environmental issues. Through this project she realised how interconnected the world was and that she could not “run away from these kind of problems”. This, she thought, was the beginning of her interest in “structural peace”.

She also attributes significant influence over her trajectory to the people she met. This is perhaps most explicitly signified with the quote that she used to conclude her MN: “出会いが人を変え感動が人を育てる” (de ai no hito wo kae kando ga hito wo sodateru - encounters change people and impressions grow people). This statement is supported throughout her MN by references to international students who helped her to improve her English (see figure 4.11 for her visual representation of this) and further her knowledge of peace, by enabling her to “meet new values and social culture through individuals” leading her to her “learning strategy in NLAU, in terms of peace studies, [...] to meet people as many as possible”. Then during the CNA, she said:

“The luckiest thing in my life, is that I could meet a lot of good people. Like having a lot of experience, so they taught me a lot of things. If I just got the



knowledge or experience from parents or my people around me, it would be impossible to choose what I did.”

An early example of how Akari broadened her social context was her participation in the citizen’s group that she joined while working her first job. The group was “so diverse, like teachers, NGO staff, or no certain decent job but lots of experience – so diverse!”, and she partly attributed her proactive attitude to the members of this group because they always emphasised the importance of action. When Arisa asked Akari, during the CNA, who had been the greatest inspiration to her, she answered:

“Eh? Most? Ah. Maybe teachers in Osaka Jogakuin College. Their guest teachers are mostly NGO staff.. and also Koyonagi-sensei, who are introduced in the community. He was a pastor... bokushi (*Japanese for pastor*). And he had been working and helping people in Kanagasaki, homeless people, for many years; and his knowledge was so huge, but he always said knowledge is just knowledge, you have to use it, so his words were very powerful. [...] He said, never forget and never stop (*inaudible*), you have to keep continuing, keep doing, keep thinking, keep studying forever [...]. And Koyanagi-sensei is over 75 years-old and he says, “It’s your problem because I will die soon, so (*laugh*), boku wa shinimasu kara (*repeating in Japanese*)”, he always said that, so (*laugh*).”

The experiences described in this section and effect they had of opening Akari’s perspective to enable her to imagine being a peace scholar are an instance of broadening her horizons of significance (Taylor, 1991). Without the social context that was afforded to her by the education system of the region where she grew up, the peace-oriented two-year college and its teachers, and the civic organisation in which she participated while working, she may not have been able to imagine the path she took. Then, at NLAU, she saw her relationships with international students as further deepening her knowledge of peace. In these ways, her social context enabled the development of Akari’s peace scholar identity. Also evident in these descriptions, however, is the agency involved in this process, in choosing values from some phases of her life and rejecting others.

## 4.6 Wakako's trajectory

Wakako describes her learning as a result of her interpersonal friendships, shaped by the places she was in, NLAU, Akita and the university of her study abroad in the US. She described the outcome of her learning at NLAU as becoming an “intercultural and open-minded person”. She exercised control over this process by seeking out friendships with a diversity of people and “absorb[ing] some of their values and viewpoints” and expressing her individuality. She also, however, emphasised the role of close friends “from similar backgrounds” in creating and sustaining the emotional conditions that enabled self and social exploration. Here, I discuss this trajectory in relation to learner autonomy.

Wakako's MN had two distinct components. The first I refer to as the Web MN (see figure 4.12), which utilises Prezi to depict a web diagram with her name written inside a circle, representing her, in the centre and around it are arranged photographs of people and words in rounded frames, connected to the circle in the centre. She explained that this represented all that had influenced her learning in NLAU. The second component of her MN I refer to as the Stop-Motion MN ([click here to see the video](#)) because it was a two-minute stop-motion animation video, utilising, she said, more than a thousand photographs. She explained that she combined the photographs by means of computer software. The video represented Wakako as a round off-white ball made from flour and water. This ball moved through various scenes, encountering other people, represented by other balls of varying colours (to represent their diversity), and activities, such as farming and interacting with people. Through participating in these activities, the ball representing Wakako took on some of the colour of the other balls and objects, signifying the influence they had had on her.

The first major theme described in this account is Wakako's emphasis on learning through interpersonal relationships situated in various places (in section 4.6.1). Then I describe the way that Wakako fostered her individuality in section 4.6.2; and 4.6.3 describes the supportive role played by close friends from similar sociocultural contexts.

#### *4.6.1 “It’s only like knowledge, but when [I] communicate with people or in contact with people, it’s gonna be the real thing”: learning through relationships and places*

The main thrust of Wakako’s MNs and related conversations was that she learned to be an “intercultural and open-minded person” as a result of the people whom she befriended and communicated with; and these interpersonal relationships and what she learned from them were shaped by the places in which she was situated: Akita and the US.

In her Stop-Motion MN, Wakako described the way that she learned from other people as follows: “Through NLAU life, I faced various kinds of people, especially students from other countries. I spent time cooking, walking, talking and doing crazy things with them. I tried to put myself in their shoes. I absorbed some viewpoints or values”. She represented this process visually by means of mixing the colours from the dough balls that represented her friends into the dough ball that represented her (see figure 4.13 for a screenshot of this). During the CNA, I asked her about representational choices she made when constructing the MN:

Me:            So, when you moved past the other coloured balls, you kind of picked up some of their ideas... I noticed not all of them, though. You only chose about three or four... Er, was that deliberate or was it a practical thing?

Wakako:    Errr.... Like... I mean... there’s many like things around me but I could see only like a few things... I mean there is more.

Me:            So there was more, but you didn’t necessarily pick it all up.

Wakako:    I guess I tried but I didn’t go deep.

Me:            Ah, OK, so you tried... so you didn’t reject certain ideas.

Wakako:    Yah, I tried to accept anything, but there is limit, so there’s more.

This dialogue suggests that she was aware of her horizons of significance (Taylor, 1991)



Figure 4.12. Wakako's Web MN.



Figure 4.13. Screenshot from the Stop-Motion MN, representing visually Wakako absorbing values from people she met.

- as constituted in the individuals around her, as well as the limits of her perspective - and drew from them in the service of shaping her self. When I asked her, in the CNA, about why she did this, she said, “I really like interacting with people, to know more new ways of seeing the world from others. I really like it [...] Yeah. I like how others thinking. Like they... it’s really fun to see that”. As for her indiscriminate approach to “absorbing” the values of others, during the CNA, she makes numerous references to the oppressive effects of being judged by others (some instances are referenced later) and sees becoming “open-minded and intercultural” as a primary outcome of her time at NLAU. This suggests that being non-judgmental is valuable to her. Valuing non-judgemental interpersonal relationships underlies much of the learning trajectory that follows. This agentic behaviour guided by values that Wakako arguably chose resonates with Sneddon’s notion of self-shaping types 1 and 2. Although Wakako does not mention it, the mindset that she described resonates with the institutional discourse of the university, particularly the President’s Message, in which he stressed the importance of “liberating ourselves from the values and customs that have shaped us and create our new selves” (NLAU, 2017c). This suggests that such institutional discourse plays a role in the constitution of the horizons of significance (Taylor, 1991) from which Wakako has drawn values in the construction of her identity.

This process of learning by engaging with people in the places she was in continued beyond the NLAU campus. Being in Akita, an agricultural area, led Wakako to an interest in agriculture. In her Stop-Motion MN she said:

“In Akita, middle of nowhere, I enjoyed agriculture. All things started from the day I participated planting rice event. Through growing rice, I could interact with local people who all are already over 60. And then I continued this interaction with them for these four years and I physically and mentally grew up.”

When, during the CNA, in reference to the Web MN, I asked her what kind of impact her agricultural experience had had on her she said: “Mmm, my future future dream is run a hostel. So I’m gonna grow plants by myself and offer dinner using that kind of plants, and most of them can stay. Yeah that’s what I want to do”. She also said that, as a result of rice planting and conversations with local people, she became interested in issues

that Akita faces, such as an aging population and a lack of people willing to work in the primary industries – rice farming and fishing, for instance - on which Akita's economy depends.

In the CNA, Wakako continued to elaborate on the interrelation between her interpersonal relationships and her learning. The fundamentally social nature of language learning arose frequently. In terms of English learning, she spoke little about her struggles with TOEFL and emphasised that she felt that language was secondary to interpersonal relationships: she felt that unless there was a mutual interest between two people, there could be no communication, regardless of whether they have a common language. She did, however, acknowledge that a certain level of English was necessary for her, but the way she developed it was through her friendships. She said the following about her experience in the US in response to my question about this, during the CNA:

“So non-verbal communication is important for me. Like if I can speak a little bit, but really we want to know each other, we can be friends, but we need English of course to communicate with others, and like Teddy is the best person for me to improve my English because he always listens to me and he like listens to my whole story of my story so I can speak and use some phrases or sentences and always like listens and he always summarise what I said so I can learn more expressions [...] Yeah, and like every day I speak to Teddy so my English became a little bit faster.”

She extended this social approach to language learning to other languages, too, in relation to her friends among the international students at NLAU: “I have some friends from like Venezuela, Germany, Russia, and... so like because I wanted to talk in their mother tongues, I got interested in Spanish German or Russian. So, they were the trigger for me to learn languages”, she said about her Web MN, during the CNA.

Wakako also emphasised the social dimension in her academic learning, particularly during her study abroad in the US. She described processes in which what she was learning academically was both stimulated and made relevant by the friends she made

and her conversations with them. She said during the CNA, “I mean I can learn academic things directly, from lectures, but it’s only like knowledge, but when [I] communicate with people or in contact with people, it’s gonna be the real thing”, suggesting that by relating concepts learned in the classroom to people who she knew led to a more authentic form of knowledge. In particular, she described her experiences of learning about race, global issues and gender. During the CNA, she said of learning about issues of race:

“And, so like during study abroad I also get more interests, so like, since I went to the US to study abroad, and before that outside of this campus I had never seen black people or other ethnicities, other than Japanese. So for me it was kind of surprise to see many ethnicities, ethnic people? Ethnicities. So also I took race and ethnicity as a course, in like as a course. And so I could apply that kind of theory or what I had learned in that course to my life in the US [...] Yeah, not only like lecture, like a real story of like racism or prejudice thing.”

And then of learning about global issues she said:

“Yeah, and also people who I met in the US includes some students from developing countries, and they try to improve their country, that’s why they came to the US for the exchange program. And they were so enthusiastic to global issues, like asylum seekers or something like that. I learned that term in the Global Seminar [in NLAU prior to study abroad], but I thought I would never use that term, but when I went to the US, I was talking about asylum seekers from Syria, so I thought like “Oh, that’s an important word for me”. So, in that way, I could connect academic things to my real life.”

And, about gender issues she said:

“And also [...] gender thing, I took some courses, *nandake* (*Japanese for “what was it again?”*), Family, Sex, Children was the title of the course. So, yeah, I learned some gender issues and things like that, and I had some people who

were LGBT, and so like I could see that kind of issues more towards me. How to explain that... it was erm, the real thing.”

The above extracts illustrate the ways in which relating academic concepts to her friends’ experiences enabled Wakako to construct more authentic, relevant knowledge, but during the CNA, I became curious about how she perceived the relationship between her friendships and her learning, which resulted in the following dialogue:

Me: Yeah, so was it... so... presumably you had these encounters, you met people, and did they specifically talk about these areas? Or was it just your relationship with that person that made you connect things that you were learning in the classroom or reading about, or...?

Wakako: [...] sociology stuff... It was like sociology was interesting as a course, at first, and the teacher was good, so I liked that course. But like, since I had that kind of knowledge, when I meet my friends, I could see... like if we... if I didn’t have knowledge, we would be just like *friends*.

Me: Right.

I interpreted this to mean that having knowledge of the sociological issues, as manifested in her friends’ experiences, enabled her to better understand those aspects of her friends that were related to those issues, thereby adding a dimension to those friendships, in addition to enabling a more authentic understanding of the sociological issues. Wakako was keen to emphasise that it was not the case that her “academic curiosity pushed [her] to have contact with them”. It seems that Wakako’s friends deepened her knowledge of sociological issues, and her sociological knowledge deepened her understanding of her friends. That sociology became a part of Wakako’s thinking was also emphasised in her Stop-Motion MN: she said (during the CNA) that pink represented sociology; this was the only colour to which she attributed specific significance and it was mixed into the dough ball that represented Wakako, suggesting that it became a part of her (see figure 4.13).



In all, Wakako saw her study abroad experience as profoundly formative: “During study abroad, I was caught up in American culture. In this process, I modified these ideas into my own views. Finally, I became intercultural and open-minded person”, she said during her Stop-Motion MN. Here, for the third time, she emphasised the role of place in shaping her learning. NLAU, Akita and her US study abroad university situated interpersonal relationships that mediated her learning.

In terms of Wakako’s construction of her identity, she constructed a discourse identity of an “open-minded and intercultural” person through the MNs and the CNA, in reference to the (D)iscourses that she encountered, including the NLAU institutional discourse. Like Akari, friendships constituted a significant form of identity work, which I return to in the next section. While she emphasised the situated nature of her learning throughout her MNs and the CNA, it is unclear how she constructed her identity in relation to specific CoPs because she emphasised the diversity of the friendships that she fostered, suggesting a reluctance to identify with any specific community. Rather, we could interpret Wakako’s identity construction as aligning with the ideal of cosmopolitanism. In the next subsection, we see that identifying with the ideal of cosmopolitanism conflicts with what she perceives as Japanese cultural norms.

#### *4.6.2 “Oh! I can be myself, I don’t have to follow other Japanese people”: recognising, valuing, cultivating and expressing her individuality and rejecting her Japanese identity*

Wakako’s curiosity about different ways of thinking and her emphasis on communication and fostering close interpersonal relationships, meant that she recognised and valued the individuality of others, and this helped her to recognise and value her own individuality. This manifested in seeing beyond national/ethnic stereotypes, questioning Japanese cultural norms, and striving to define and express her individuality.

During the CNA, she said of her experience of sharing dormitory rooms with international students at NLAU, “I lived with 5 or 6 roommates so far, and they were like

Americans and Canadians, and erm, so like I, so I had some typical way of seeing Americans or like Western people, but like they were different individually, so it was so fun to see how they actually live". This inclination to look beyond stereotypes was expressed more strongly later in the CNA, in the following dialogue:

Wakako: And also, so like if you're Teddy (*her best friend on her study abroad*), so he has some characteristics: he's American, a gay, his major is art, but before that he's my friend. He is himself. That's only like fuzokuhin.

Yuko: Components?

Wakako: Components.

Me: Right.

Wakako: And people do like "he's *a* gay person", to see him as a gay person, and that's wrong!

Me: Right, and ignore all of his other components

Wakako: So I want to... if I see some people, I want to think he is himself before he has components. That's what I want to do to make more new friends.

Perhaps this notion that there is something more fundamental in individuals than the social categories to which they belong is the essence of what Wakako considered to be the learning outcome of her time at NLAU, when, in the Stop-Motion MN, she said, "finally, I became intercultural and open-minded person".

Wakako made numerous references, during the CNA, to a sense that this individualistic mindset set her apart from other Japanese people. This meant that during her study abroad she spent little time with other Japanese people. I asked her about this in the CNA:

Me: So were you ever tempted to just stay in your little Japanese community when you were in America?

Wakako: No. Hell no! There was a Japanese community and I attended. There was a club JCP, and I attended that because I wanted to

teach Japanese to Americans and I wanted to teach Japanese “real culture” to Americans, so I did something with them, but mainly I hung out with these kinds of people (*gesturing towards the Web MN*)

Me: I see. So was it like a conscious decision to avoid the Japanese community, or was it...?

Wakako: Kind of... because my senpai (her senior in NLAU) said that if you... and I wanted to improve my English so like they said that if you want to do that you shouldn't stay with Japanese people. And also I didn't want to stay with them because they were not comfortable for me to talk. They judge a lot.

Wakako's sense of being judged by Japanese people for not conforming to the norms of Japanese culture arose frequently in the CNA. She thought that while in elementary school she had been “free and open-minded”, but then in junior high school and high school she had felt constrained by the judgemental environment and had become reserved as a result. Wakako and Yuko both agreed that the NLAU Japanese community was also judgemental, but there were alternative communities with which to engage, allowing Wakako to befriend a diversity of people. I asked Wakako about her motivation to seek out diverse friendships in the following dialogue, during the CNA:

Me: So, I'm just trying to understand your reasons for making as many different kinds of friends as possible. So, at the back of your mind was this idea that you wanted to expand your view and go beyond the stereotypes that you had. So, I think that's really good, but why? Why did you want to do that?

Wakako: It's my characteristic to know more new things, I wanna learn more things and if it's related to my friends then I wanna do more and, yeah maybe just because I want to do that. And in the US I always wanted to be crazy always. (*Laughing*) I wanted to do something different.

Me: Right.

Yuko: There's no one judging you. There are no Japanese people....

Wakako: Yeah! (*Laughing*) All these Japanese people. I don't care! I wanna what I want to do. My friends are crazy so I wanted to do some things...

During the CNA, when asked how this judgement by Japanese people manifested, Wakako explained that rumours would start if she did anything unusual. The conflict between her desire to "do crazy things" and the sense of being judged by her Japanese peers was a persistent theme throughout the CNA and later conversations.

Wakako's desire to develop her individuality and the resulting rumours spread by the Japanese people when she expressed it, led her to construct (d)iscourse of herself that differentiated her from other Japanese students. This forced her to question her Japanese cultural identity, which could be considered to be a critical experience. Together, the rumours and Wakako's (d)iscourse were mutually constitutive of her discourse identity. In Wenger's (1998a) terms, she constructed an identity of non-participation in relation to the Japanese NLAU student community and refused to align with Japanese cultural norms. In Sneddon's (2013) terms, by rejecting the perceived Japanese value of conformity and choosing the liberal values of tolerance and individualism and in her efforts to embody them through the actions and thought processes that she describes, she is self-shaping in a profound way.

Wakako described, during the CNA, how she was particularly inspired by the LGBTQ community to express her individuality. She spoke of friends who identified as LGBTQ:

Wakako: I know Yuko through.....

Yuko: Diversity Club things.

Wakako: Yeah, and so... I thought you have confidence when I was here. And I study abroad and like also in the US, it is a conservative part of the US so they somehow like following others or like mind others eyes, but gay people are always judged by others so they don't care, so I was impressed by their way of life. Like, I know her (*pointing to Yuko*), but I mean I thought it was only Yuko's thing (*laughter*).

- Yuko: OK, so “it’s not the community it’s me”, type of thing.
- Wakako: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So they’re doing like their stuff, so maybe I can do it my own way, too. Like that.
- Me: I see. So they were people who were also ignoring the peer-pressure of the norm.
- Wakako: Yeah. Yeah, because that’s their identity. They don’t ermm (*gestures veering to the side*) [...] How do you say ‘mageru’? ... They don’t give up their thing.
- Me: They don’t veer away from.
- Wakako: Yeah... My best friend in the US was like that.
- Me: I see.
- Wakako: So, when I act with them, I like...
- Me: It gives you confidence to be yourself because that’s what they’re doing?
- Wakako: Yeah... And they were also drag queens, so... and then in the dorm they would dress up at midnight and they just like walked around in the dorm and nobody judged them, they were, “Oh, you’re so cute today, as well!”, like that. So like “Oh, they have friends as well” and then [I saw that] to show your self is cool.

Wakako continued to differentiate this way of being with Japanese cultural conventions throughout the CNA and subsequent sessions. Returning to Wakako’s construction of her identity through her friendships, the means by which she did this could be conceived as “associational embracement” and “associational distancing” (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Associational embracement refers to the definition of oneself in reference to the positive attributes of others. In Wakako’s case, in emphasising the strength of her friendships with her “crazy” friends, she defines herself in these terms. Associational distancing involves separation from others in order to maintain one’s self-concept, which is what Wakako appears to have done with the Japanese people by whom she felt judged.

#### 4.6.3 “So they were like, yeah, supporters who improved me”: emotional support in solidarity with her core friend group

In spite of the (d)iscourse identity Wakako constructed distancing herself from Japanese culture, she stated at the beginning of her explanation of her Web MN and at other times through the CNA that she was dependent for emotional support on a group of Japanese NLAU students with whom she had remained close throughout her time at NLAU. She said while pointing to the photograph of Japanese people next to the centre of the Web MN: “Like Japanese people, my friends, are like the supporters of me. If I had trouble or struggling with something, they always help me and they talk with me. So, they were like, yeah, supporters who improved me”. In contrast to the approach of seeking out friends with “different ways of thinking” described elsewhere, these friends were “similar to [her]: they were from Kansai area, [her] hometown, and they have same [...] academic background”.

On arriving at NLAU, Wakako, like Yamato, had felt inferior to others and unable to cope with the demands of NLAU life. During the CNA, Wakako and Yuko spoke of the first time that they met, during orientation week:

Wakako: Yah, I was crying when I met her.

Yuko: We were in the TLP (*this denotes NLAU’s teacher licence program, available to students who wish to prepare for the national teacher’s licence exam while undertaking their degree*) orientation presentation... No it was about financial aid and she was sitting next to me and she was crying, you know...

Wakako: I was sitting with other friends. They were kikokushijou.. returnees, so they can speak English fluently and I was like feeling I can’t do anything. And she came to me and she bring me to other people like them (*gesturing to the photo of her Japanese friends*), and that was my first time to see other Japanese, like normal (*laugh*).

Wakako said that prior to meeting these friends, “everyone seemed better than me in many ways... and I didn’t have place (*laughing*). I was like a refugee at that time”, weeping as she said it, and then after meeting the friends, she said “yeah, I got the place where I could be myself. Before that I couldn’t”. From this point on, this group of students with similarly conventional Japanese backgrounds formed her core group of friends throughout her NLAU life.

This supportive group of friends, who were similar to her, played a key role in Wakako’s autonomy. The previous subsection 4.6.2, describes Wakako’s rejection of Japanese norms and seeking to expand her horizons of significance, but encounters with people different to her initially led to negative self-evaluations – she felt that being herself would reveal her inadequacies. This was injurious to the self-worth, self-trust and self-respect that are necessary to be autonomous (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000a). During this time (and perhaps other times in her trajectory) she sought comfort in solidarity with those who suffered in similar ways. We saw a similar emotional reaction in Yamato’s trajectory – once he stopped comparing himself to people from different (more international) backgrounds and instead identified with people with similar origins, he felt more secure in himself. The position of the photograph of these friends, closest to the centre of the circle that represents Wakako (see figure 4.12), signifies the fundamental role played by these friendships in her learning, through the emotional wellbeing that they bring. Only from this position of self-worth, self-trust and self-respect could Wakako begin to explore and extend her horizons of significance and self-shape – be an autonomous learner.

## 4.7 Yuko’s trajectory

Yuko had an inferiority complex resulting from her complex pre-NLAU life. She sought an education at NLAU to gain self-esteem, and while there, came to terms with her transnational identity and gained confidence in her ability to achieve things. This account of her trajectory describes the social and psychological forces involved in her NLAU life.





Figure 4.14. Yuko's MN.



Unlike the other IGMs, Yuko did not present her trajectory chronologically or with a language component. Rather, her MN consisted of a drawing (see figure 4.14), which she produced towards the end of the inquiry (in contrast to the others for whom the MN was their point of departure). Much of the detail about her experiences at NLAU, and before, was described in activities and conversations throughout the inquiry. Therefore, the main sources of data upon which I draw for this section are: conversations throughout the inquiry; a book chapter she had published in an academic volume (Sato, 2017), which she initially brought in lieu of her MN, which we read and discussed in Session 15; a word-web that Yuko and Wakako drew in session 16, which for Wakako was part of her CNA and for Yuko was part of the preparation for her drawing/MN (I have not included this in the main body of the chapter because it is too chaotic to be helpful to the reader - although it did prompt valuable dialogue about their experiences - but I have included it as Appendix 4.1); and her drawing/MN, which provides a visual overview of Yuko's psychosocial trajectory.

I analysed Yuko's MN by means of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic framework, but this provides too much detail to include in this chapter in its entirety, so I include it as Appendix 4.2, provide a brief overview here, and reference it throughout this section. The dark grasping figure climbing up the spider's thread, in the centre right of the picture, towards education, represented by the owl, the library and the classroom, from the darkness below, signifies education as the route to self-respect and respect from others. This element of the image draws on Akutagawa's (1918) "The Spider's Thread", a tale in which Buddha lowers a spider's thread from heaven down to hell to offer the wicked Kandata a chance of redemption. The lone figure in the classroom at the top, depicted with an eyeball as a head, staring at a projector screen, signifies Yuko's occasional feeling that she is being "brainwashed" (I do not develop this point in this section, because I considered to be tertiary to her trajectory, but it is relevant to her reflections on the inquiry process documented in section 5B.4). The books falling off the shelf and tumbling down into the abyss with her money, in the bottom left of the image signify Yuko's anxiety about the cost of her education, and associated feelings of inferiority, threatening to drag her down. The homogenous blue group watching on from the

right side of the picture, signify the majority group of students by whom she feels judged. the white figure, on the left, preventing her from falling into the abyss signifies her partner and others who support her, Yuko confirmed.

I construct my account of Yuko's trajectory using all the mentioned data sources and, as with the others, I relate it to theory on learner autonomy.

#### *4.7.1 "Family and my negative feelings just dragging me down. Like, all those bad envy, feeling incompetent and inferior": money related sense of inferiority*

As stated above, Yuko conceives her trajectory through NLAU as taking steps to deal with her inferiority complex. When speaking about her MN, she said:

"I don't know. I'm always fighting with feeling like being not confident and inferior in like, I'm really good at finding ways to say see, I'm not really good at this. So that's kind of... and I know that it all comes from, you know, my... the way I grew up and the struggles I had when I was younger and all those, and then family issues and money. So it's all in there. But then. But then education and learning why I feel this way helps me a lot to sort of put myself out... and then I guess I don't really show it in the surface of that kind of negative feelings. That I hold in myself."

Yuko spoke of the "way that she grew up and the struggles" in reference to the book chapter she wrote (Sato, 2017). I provide an overview of them here in reference to both the conversations and the contents of the book chapter. She received conflicting messages about how to be from each parent and her school. In accordance with her mother's wishes, she attended a Catholic school, where she "was taught with very strict discipline to be a charming and lovely lady based on religious and traditional Japanese values: to be passive, obedient and sophisticated", whereas her brother was allowed to attend an academically more competitive state school. She struggled to meet the expectations of the Catholic school. However, in

response to complaints from the school about Yuko's conduct, her father praised her passion and encouraged her to cultivate her individuality.

Her parents divorced and her mother took Yuko and her brother to live in Seattle, in the US, when Yuko was ten years old, to pursue a graduate education. After the inevitable struggles with English and a different classroom environment, she adapted and began to embrace her Japanese American immigrant identity. This, however, conflicted with her mother's desire to maintain Yuko's Japanese identity, so she was sent to a Japanese school on Saturdays, but she eventually rebelled and quit. At this point, issues relating to her national identity were compounded by recognition of her sexuality and gender identity. Her mother struggled to accept Yuko's "Americanised liberal, and gender fluid" (Sato, 2017: 4) self, so Yuko ran away to live with her girlfriend. She struggled but persevered through school and eventually gained a place at a Junior College in Seattle. There, however, she met another challenge to her identity: her immigration status came into question, so she had to apply for an international student visa. This meant that she was left behind by her American friends and the administration treated her as an international student – she "felt as if [her] American identity was being rejected" (Sato, 2017: 4). This situation was then compounded when, on graduating from the college, she was no longer eligible to remain in the US, so she was forced to return to Japan to seek employment.

On returning to Japan, despite Yuko's attempts to fit into the Japanese working culture, working at a travel agency, she was always seen as a 'kikokushijo', which literally translates to 'repatriated child', but Yuko, in her chapter, defines it as "a weird/different girl who's been outside of Japan for too long and could not behave properly as an ordinary Japanese" (Sato, 2017: 4). She eventually "snapped" (p.4), left her job and moved into a shelter for survivors of the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami, in Fukushima, and worked as a teaching assistant, helping young kikokushijo. This experience brought her own issues with language, race and culture to the fore, so she applied to NLAU, where she hoped she would be able to better understand these issues.

There were many challenges to Yuko's control over her identity during this period. She went through a series of critical experiences (Block, 2007), which prompted struggles to belong. She felt out of place in her Christian school in Japan and being taken to the US meant she had to adapt to a foreign cultural and linguistic environment. She appeared, however, to take control over her identity when she rejected the Japanese identity that her mother attempted to impose upon her (leaving the Japanese Saturday school) and in embracing her "liberal Americanised and gender fluid" identity. But then the issues imposed upon her by her immigration status prompted another critical experience. In this case, in Gee's (2000) terms, her institutional identity ceased to align with her discourse identity: the American discourse identity that she had spent years (co)constructing was undermined by her non-American institutional identity. Then, while back in Japan, she had little control over her discourse identity: regardless of her efforts to fit in, she was always seen only as a *kikokushijo*. Although this did not happen in NLAU, it is the history that Yuko took there, which had a significant impact on her trajectory, and considering the inevitable impact that Yuko has had on the NLAU community (not least in her establishment of the Diversity Club that Yamato joined), it is a part of the dynamics of NLAU. Furthermore, it is instructive in that it highlights the extent to which context can constrain the capacity of an individual to control their identity – to be autonomous.

These experiences of instability resulted in a lack of self-esteem. During conversations about her chapter, she said:

"My life is always out of comfort zone. And that gave me a lot of motivation, but also a lot of stress and a lot of, yeah, and I guess to have one ground that you like solid ground helps you to be a stronger and more confident person, but to be outside of comfort zone all the time. Really I really struggled with like self-confidence and self... what do you call it? to sort of take like love myself as who I am".

Yuko felt that these feelings of inferiority often arose in conjunction with her anxiety about money. As noted the beginning of section 4.7, she represents this visually in her MN (figure 4.14). During conversations about the word-web, she said:

“That feeling of like I don't know how you word it, but that feeling of inferiority always comes with money. I really usually don't feel inferior to others about anything but my, you know, like envy and inferiority always comes with the idea of money”

She attributes this to her family situation:

- Yuko: It's like my personal stuff, but my brother my brother doesn't have anything because he our parents paid for everything. But for me, I was left with debt. They ran out of money. Paying for him to go to music school.
- Me: So when you say he doesn't have anything, he doesn't have any debt?
- Yuko: It's just me. So I feel really... I always question “Why is it always me to do this?” I always feel I don't know how you... maybe I'm like small hearted, cold hearted? Cold hearted, but like I always feel like “why is it always me who's always like trying too hard when he gets it for free?”.
- Me: I'd say it's pretty natural to feel like that.
- Wakako: Yeah.  
[...]
- Yuko: Yeah, my dad seems busy paying for my half-sister. He's like... she's like fourteen or something. And she goes to private school. You know, everything. But I also usually it's always money. But I feel that way. A few really. When it comes to money. It's really stressful. It's like a trigger. It really, really makes me anxious, and like inferior. Other stuff. If I get a bad grade it's my fault, you know. If I get judged by people, I can deal with it, but money, it's out of my hands.

Yuko feels that the small and isolated nature of the NLAU community exacerbates her money-related inferiority complex because economic inequality among the students is salient. “A lot of the kids who come to NLAU are very wealthy, so that I think we can say that it's connected to NLAU”, she said during conversations about the word-web. I asked her if this economic inequality resulted in barriers between the students. She replied: “no, I would look at it more of my personal issue because I have to deal with it on my... You know, it's my issue”. Regardless of the cause, feelings of inferiority are synonymous with a lack of self-worth and are associated with a lack self-trust and self-respect, which are the emotional foundations of autonomy (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000a).

#### *4.7.2 “If you don't know what's going on, you still kind of feel sad, but you don't know why”: negotiating a non-junjapa identity*

At NLAU, Yuko was again faced with issues relating to her kikukoshijo identity. Although she was not alone in this, the majority of degree-seeking Japanese students had little or no international experience and had been through the standard Japanese education system. Due to the presence of international students and other students, like Yuko, who had more complex cultural heritage, Japanese students with no international experience came to be known as ‘junjapa’, a neologism derived from the Japanese word, ‘純’ (jun), which translates to ‘pure’, ‘true’, ‘genuine’, ‘innocent’ or ‘unmixed’, and ‘japa’, abbreviated from ‘Japanese’: ‘junjapa’ = ‘pure Japanese’. So significant is this phenomena that there are at least two academic publications written about it by NLAU students: one is Yuko’s chapter (Sato, 2017), a ‘kikokushijo’, and a (now ex-)graduate student at NLAU (Wada, 2017). The Japanese students who Wakako perceived to be conforming to Japanese cultural norms and judging her for failing to do so fall into the category of junjapa, and this is the term that both Yuko and Wakako adopted to discuss the dynamics involving this group.. Junjapa distinguished themselves from ‘non-junjapa’. This distinction was reinforced institutionally through the Bridge Program, which enabled students with high fluency in English and significant international experience to skip EAP classes. With

her native fluency in English and her experience living in the US, Yuko qualified for the Bridge Program, making her a non-junjapa.

Yuko thought that the junjapa students tended to feel inferior to the non-junjapa, due to their struggles with English and lack of international experience (which are both valued highly at NLAU). However, because of this shared inferiority complex, the junjapa find solidarity with each other, and form a dominant majority group, who both Yuko and Wakako thought continued to adhere to Japanese cultural norms. Yuko (and Wakako) felt this group judged Japanese students who did not conform to these norms, which Yuko described as “strict and ordered”. In reference to the word-web, I asked them how this judgement manifested in the behaviour of junjapa students, and they responded:

Yuko:       Rumours. Talking behind their back? They wouldn't like point you out like things out but like rumours, janai (*Japanese rejoinder*)?

Wakako:   Exclusion.

Yuko:       Exclusion, yeah.

Wakako:   They don't hang out with me, or they when they go somewhere they don't invite me, or they do party but don't invite me.

Yuko:       Exactly how I felt. So they... So this leads to exclusion. Right.

In Wenger's (1998a) terms, Yuko was a 'marginalised' participant in the junjapa CoP and until she reified this identity it caused her distress. She said during conversations about the word-web, “If we don't [...] know what's going on. You still kind of feel sad, but you don't know why”. However, once she reified her position as a non-participant in the junjapa CoP, she was able to embrace her non-junjapa identity. I noted that both Yuko and Wakako (in her apparent rejection of aspects of Japanese culture) took some pride in not conforming to the junjapa norms. They replied:

Yuko:       I mean, I didn't. When I was struggling, but now the time becomes like “whatever. I don't care. You know... these people”.

Wakako:   Yeah.

Yuko: I was just like, “have fun in your small little world while I do more interesting things that you don't”. So I think with time, these issues, sort of like became confidence as well.

Yuko did, however, become quite disparaging of the junjapa group. She said of an activity organised by a group of students who she perceived to be junjapa, “but yeah, it's just [being] part of the group, and that kind of like hierarchy. They crave that. And they sort of satisfy themselves by excluding others”, and “it's so Japanese... in a bad way”. In criticising and distinguishing herself from the junjapa group she is proudly constructing a non-junjapa discourse identity.

Besides exclusion, Yuko described another manifestation of the junjapa-non-junjapa dynamic: she felt that junjapa students expected non-junjapa to have no discrepancies in their abilities to speak, listen, read and write, whereas, in fact, many non-junjapa struggled with academic writing, including Yuko; and Yuko felt the pressure to live up to these expectations and not ‘waste’ the advantages bestowed upon her. She said during conversations about her book chapter:

“I think I had like an, I thought I had to give an excuse for not being junjapa. So because I have I'm not a junjapa and because these kids are able to do this, even though they are junjapa. I have to try harder. So that then these kids and be always better at being better than these kids because that's what they expect me to be and that's what I thought I have to try go for.”

She said she put a lot of pressure on herself to live up to these expectations, which she initially found stressful. As she began to prove herself academically and peers in Yuko's cohort gained international experience, she became more relaxed about this. She said during conversations about her chapter:

“I guess after all, this experience of four years being here, I'm a little bit more at ease, and I'm more... I learned how to be easy to myself until this until then, I was like, really, really pushing myself really hard to the point that I was like to stress out to do anything when pretty much depressed. But now I feel like I



can finally be in line with other students and especially my you know, my 11th (*students who began in the 11th year after the establishment of NLAU*) NLAU students. I don't have to distinguish myself and put an extra weight on myself."

Yuko attributed her success in coming to terms with her non-junjapa identity, in part, to observing her peers make the transition from junjapa to non-junjapa, as they gained knowledge and experience of issues relating to race and culture. She said in conversations about the chapter:

"So that's that, for me is a really important part of NLAU's education is to see the change of you guys (*laugh*). And by just looking at that, I can be more subjective... erm objective about myself as well as a student and as a learner."

She also thought that writing the chapter was instrumental in reifying her transnational identity.

#### 4.7.3 *"It gave me a motive to move and you know, try hard. So, at the end, it became a confidence": gaining confidence through academic success*

As represented in her MN, Yuko perceived her education at NLAU as a route out of the hardship that she was experiencing in her life, which gave her great motivation to succeed. She said about her MN, referring to the dark figure climbing up the centre-right of the picture:

"I mean, that represents the part of me, who was really desperate for education and for achievements. That's why I made the hands bigger than the body, because it's... it... really... I wanted to show how desperate I am. The desperate is also motivation to reach. If I didn't have this, I wouldn't be trying so hard to climb up."

Adding to this pressure to succeed was the perceived expectations of the junjapa students, described above, and the financial pressure of graduating within four years. She said, however, in reference to the word-web:

“I mean, expectation and pressure was coming with like others, right. And erm because I'm Bridge. I'm supposed to be doing better. Because I'm, you know, because I don't have money. I have to try harder and try not to, you know, I have to graduate in four years. I cannot extend it like other people, because that means plus, how many hundreds of yen a month, man (*Japanese for tens of thousand*) yen, and so that pressure and expectation always come... came with me. But it although it wasn't a good motivation, it gave me a motive to move and you know, try hard. So, at the end, it became a confidence. But I didn't realise it when I was fighting with the pressure and expectation. So I think I think with time, this all came. So time, it became a confidence times but...”

During the sessions, she noted a number of ways that she felt to have succeeded, which helped her to gain confidence. She excelled in the writing classes, in spite of finding it difficult, she was successful in a competitive scholarship application for her study abroad, and she published the aforementioned chapter in an academic book. She also said that living in Akita and working as a tutor in the Academic Achievement (AAC) gave her confidence.

Although she acknowledged her own effort and agency in these successes, she also emphasised the supporting role of others. For instance, she said of the white figure on the left side of her MN:

“That's [my partner]. So this myself... that's myself (*indicating the black figure with octopus tentacles*). Sort of like dragging me down to the bad parts. Negative feelings. But then I guess she kind of helps me stay up. So yeah, I mean, it's not just [my partner], but people who's encouraging me to stay in school and keep going. But then I also have to sort of like hang on to them in order to keep myself

up. So I always have this other side of me, who's pulling me down that's other people helping me out”

## 4.8 Discussion and conclusion

I structure this discussion in terms of the overarching question that the inquiry seeks to address - how is learner autonomy manifested in the context of NLAU? – in relation to four themes that emerged in the accounts of the trajectories described above. These are: coping with critical experiences (discussed in section 4.8.1); defining the self (discussed in section 4.8.2); positioning within social context (section 4.8.3); and overcoming academic obstacles (4.8.4). Themes interact in complex ways and what becomes clear is the affordances and constraints on the learner autonomy of the IGMs, so I describe those in section 4.8.5. In addressing these themes, I refer to the secondary research questions: how NLAU students construct their identities in relation to the immediate and broader sociocultural, and physical context of NLAU; how they exercise control over this process; and what role their histories play in these processes. Finally, I conclude in section 4.8.6.

### *4.8.1 Coping with critical experiences*

As stated earlier Block’s (2007: 20–21) concept of “critical experiences” refers to periods in one’s life in which any sense of a stable identity that one might have had is upset, prompting a struggle to find balance, resulting in the transformation of one’s identity. Such experiences relate to learner autonomy in two ways: in the process of engaging with critical experiences – the agentic seeking of answers to one’s predicaments; and they can lead to increased self-knowledge which enables self-conscious construction of our identities. I discuss these in relation to the critical experiences described in the IGMs’ accounts of their learning trajectories through NLAU.

Considering NLAU’s multilingual and culturally complex, as well as academically demanding environment, it is likely that most students entering NLAU undergo a

critical experience of some kind, but it was the accounts of Ayuka, Yamato, Wakako and Yuko (see appendix 3.11, or table 3.1, subsection 3.4.2) for a reminder of key aspects of each IGM) that provided the deepest insights into their critical experiences. All these examples resulted in increased self-knowledge: in the case of Ayuka, Wakako and Yuko, it was of knowledge of their sociohistorical constitution and in Yamato's case it was psychological. Ayuka's struggles to socially integrate on her study abroad brought her immigrant identity to her attention, which in turn led her to better understand the social dynamics of her hometown and her place within it. Wakako and Yuko's sense of exclusion by students who they deemed to be 'junjapa' led to revelations about their relationships with Japanese culture. In contrast, although Yamato did refer to his sociohistorical constitution (his success in his high school, for instance), he did not attribute it to his difficulties in participating in the NLAU context; in fact, he indicated in a later session that he was resistant to social-deterministic explanations. Rather, he attributed them to his absence of the necessary personality traits for success in NLAU: he saw himself as "passive and lazy", in contrast to the "typical NLAU student", who is "passionate" and "make[s] so many challenges".

In all above cases, the critical experiences of the IGMs prompted them to reflect on their selves in relation to their context. In all cases, then, their revelations about their selves were contingent on knowledge of their context that they were able to make egocentric. Ayuka and Wakako explicitly referenced the role of sociology classes in the development of such egocentric knowledge. Yuko, while not explicitly attributing her self-knowledge to social science classes, made frequent references to concepts that she had learned in anthropology classes and other reading she had done. Yamato, on the other hand, dismissed the social sciences, stating during the CNA that he felt they only explained obvious, everyday phenomena in difficult words. Instead, he drew comparisons between himself and those around him. All four cases involved agentic introspection, and the resulting self-knowledge informed action, which resulted in the self-conscious construction of their identities, which constitutes a degree of learner autonomy. However, a case could be made that those who became aware of their social selves were more autonomous than Yamato, who did not, since self-shaping is contingent on self-knowledge – knowledge of the source of our

motivations (Sneddon, 2013) – and one of the premises of this thesis is that social context is a significant source of our motivations.

#### *4.8.2 Defining the self*

In all the trajectories described above, defining the self was a salient manifestation of the learner autonomy of the IGMs: Ayuka, Arisa and Akari defined themselves in terms of a life plan that informed subsequent choices and action; Yamato, Wakako and Yuko defined themselves, through (d)iscourse, contrasting themselves to a constructed ‘other’.

Ayuka and Arisa’s career plans resulted from their experiences at NLAU, and Akari’s life-long ambition to be a peace scholar informed her decision to go to NLAU and all choices described in the account of her trajectory above. In all three cases, they developed their career plans through reflection on their values, which they, in part, identified through their experiences at or prior to NLAU. As such, choices and actions made in line with such career plans are instances of self-shaping type 1 (Sneddon, 2013).

Before discussing the discourse identity work represented in the accounts above, it is important to recognise the identity work involved in constructing and discussing the MNs. In terms of their discourse identity, by completing the tasks, all IGMs (co)constructed aspects of their identities through creating the MNs and discussing them during the CNA. Although I prescribed these tasks, all content and representational choices were made by the IGMs. Furthermore, the introspection and resulting increase in self-knowledge, from the perspective of Sneddon’s (2013) conception of autonomy as self-shaping on the basis of self-knowledge, suggests increased potential for autonomy through the completion of the tasks. Nevertheless, the MNs were also representations of previous identity work during their time at NLAU, some of which related to their discourse identity. It is difficult, therefore, to draw a distinction between discourse identities that were constructed in and prior to the creation of their MNs and their participation in the CNAs: the distinction is inevitably blurred; a question of whether they are saying something new about

themselves or something that they have said before. Regardless, they constructed their discourse identities by reflecting on their experiences, so examining them promises to say a great deal about the NLAU context.

Although all IGMs constructed their discourse identities, which is arguably an expression of their autonomy, the accounts of Yamato, Wakako and Yuko described in depth the challenges of (d)iscourses to their autonomy and their efforts to reconcile them. Yamato described himself in contrast to his conception of the “typical NLAU student”, which I argued above results from NLAU’s institutional discourse, yet he strives to embody these ideals. A tempting interpretation to make is that since it was not Yamato’s choice to attend NLAU, by aligning himself with NLAU’s institutional discourse of fostering (as I argued in Chapter 1) autonomous individuals, he is becoming simultaneously more and less autonomous: more agentic, but more controlled by the NLAU institutional discourse. However, in stating that he wants to be more like the typical NLAU student, he is choosing those values, thereby taking control over his identity. Wakako defined herself as an “open-minded multicultural person”, which aligns closely with NLAU’s institutional discourse, and she and Yuko both spoke of themselves in contrast to the students who they argued embodied Japanese national cultural ideals. In both cases, this was prompted by their perceived exclusion from this group, which challenged their identities, but both were able to take ownership of the resulting identity. In Gee’s (2000: 104) terms, Yuko was “ascribed” the discourse identity of a ‘non-junjapa’ (just as she had been ascribed the *kikokushijo* identity), which caused her sadness, but on identifying this as the cause of her sense of exclusion, she “actively recruited” the non- junjapa discourse identity. In doing so, she took control over her identity. Although less explicitly, Wakako went through the same process: she felt judged and excluded for her unorthodox behaviour, but by attributing this to her rejection of Japanese norms, she actively recruited the discourse identity of someone who is “crazy always”. This is also a process of self-shaping (type 2) since they began to actively endorse the values in opposition to the Japanese cultural norms, as they perceived them.

Defining oneself requires the reconciliation of conflicting identity trajectories that arise from the sociohistorical constitution of the IGMs (Wenger, 1998a). I interpreted Yamato's trajectory in these terms in section 4.4.3, but this process was evident in all the accounts. Interpreted from this perspective, Ayuka's life plan of helping immigrant children in her hometown could be seen as the result of the reconciliation of identity trajectories including (but not limited to): resident of her hometown, a Christian, an excluded immigrant in the US. Arisa rejecting her hometown identity and embracing an Akita identity could also be interpreted as a reconciliation of conflicting identities. Akari's struggles to become a peace scholar involved the reconciliation of identities associated with her relatively deprived childhood and the identities related to peace scholarship. Wakako and Yuko (to different degrees) needed to reconcile identity trajectories established in the Japanese cultural context and those established outside of it. Such a process, as Wenger (1998a) points out, is necessary to deal with the inevitable ambivalence caused by conflicting identity trajectories, and from the perspective of learner autonomy, it is necessary to take control over our identities.

#### *4.8.3 Positioning within social context*

Ongoing embodied identity work involves participation in a social context. While defining ourselves in (d)iscourse is part of this, so is participation and non-participation in CoPs (Wenger, 1998a) and other kinds of interpersonal relationships such as friendships (Anthony and McCabe, 2015).

Viewed through the lens of CoPs, the NLAU context could be considered to be a constellation of CoPs that overlap and interconnect on various scales: on one end of the scale, each class and club could be considered to be distinct CoPs and, at the other end, academia could also be conceived as a global CoP. The existent CoPs in the study abroad contexts add to the complexity of this constellation. It is, in part, through their participation and non-participation that NLAU students construct their identities in relation to these CoPs. Perhaps all the accounts of the IGMs' trajectories through NLAU could be interpreted from this perspective, but here I focus on the salient examples. Arisa, Yamato, Akari and Yuko all represented

themselves as being on inbound trajectories into CoPs. Arisa represented increasingly central participation in the Kanto club and in the 'rural sustainability researcher CoP', Akari represented her sustained attempts to participate in the 'peace scholar CoP', Yamato in the 'Japanese NLAU student CoP' and Yuko in the 'global academic CoP'. Yamato, Wakako and Yuko represented themselves as non-participants in CoPs. Yamato initially failed to participate in the perceived practices of the 'NLAU student CoP', Wakako deliberately avoided participating in the 'Japanese student abroad CoP' while on her study abroad, and Yuko was marginalised from the 'junjapa CoP', due to her migration history.

These relationships with CoPs constituted a component of their identities only to the extent that their position was reified – if it was not recognised by anyone (including themselves), it could not be considered part of their identity. As such, the role the IGMs played in reifying their own position in relation to the CoPs has implications for their control over their identities – their autonomy. In the case of Arisa, Akari and Yuko's inbound trajectories into their chosen researcher CoPs, for instance, in speaking about their participation in these CoPs they reified their identity to some extent, but this is dependent on their successful practice and the recognition they get from the community in question. Arisa's endeavour to gain a master's degree in her chosen area would help in this and Akari's peace workshops and relationships with renowned peace scholars would also assist in the reification of her peace scholar identity. Yuko's successful publication of her chapter signifies recognition from the academic community, reifying her identity in relation to global academic CoP. In these ways their actions constituted control over their identities. Similarly, the role they played in reifying their non-participation in CoPs holds implications for their autonomy. For instance, when Wakako and Yuko reified and embraced their non-junjapa identities they exercised autonomy.

Friendship can also be viewed as a form of identity work (Anthony and McCabe, 2015). All IGMs made references to friends and the supportive role that they played during their trajectory through NLAU, but Wakako represented her friendships as the primary basis of her learning; and the way that both Wakako and Yuko talked about friends related to the way they positioned themselves in social context.



Through associational embracing and distancing they situated themselves in relation to the networks within NLAU, which constitutes a part of their identity. This was most salient in the accounts of Wakako and Yuko because they described their friends and those from whom they wished to distinguish themselves in detail.

#### *4.8.4 Overcoming academic obstacles through being an active learner*

One of the preconditions for continued participation in the NLAU context, enabling all of the above, is overcoming academic obstacles. The accounts of Arisa, Yamato and Akari represented struggles in gaining a sufficient level of English and Yuko struggled to meet what she perceived to be the expectations of others on her; in particular she emphasised her difficulties with academic writing. In all cases, they took independent steps to overcome their challenges. Arisa used the available independent study facilities – the AAC and the LDIC, Yamato engaged in the social life of NLAU, Akari went to great lengths to acquire the necessary TOEFL score for advancement through the NLAU curriculum and Yuko pushed herself to excel in the writing classes and went on to publish a chapter in an academic volume. In all cases, overcoming these obstacles was necessary for them to achieve their desired identities, making learner autonomy, as traditionally conceived, a precondition of learner autonomy as I have conceived it here – as exercising control over one's identity.

#### *4.8.5 Affordances and constraints*

The described manifestations of learner autonomy - coping with critical experiences, defining the self, positioning within social context and overcoming academic obstacles – are all constituted in the individual IGMs' relationships with their context. As such their learner autonomy was subject to affordances and constraints. There were affordances and constraints pertaining to the social and physical context; and there were aspects of the individuals that influenced the way that the individual interacted with their context, thereby also constituting affordances and constraints on their learner autonomy.

In the social context, there were aspects of NLAU's institutional framework that afforded and constrained the learner autonomy processes described above. Firstly, there is the issue of institutional identity. By matriculating as NLAU students, all IGMs had their institutional identities as NLAU students authorised, which afforded their participation in all the practices relating to NLAU's curricular and extra-curricular life. This may appear a banal observation, but Akari's lack of an institutional peace scholar identity threatened to marginalise her in the peace scholar CoP, and Yuko's immigration status divorced her from her American identity and the imposition of a *kikokushijo* identity alienated her from Japanese society, undermining her attempts to integrate; and then there were echoes of this in her life at NLAU.

Secondly, and more prominently, there were affordances and constraints relating to the curriculum. The exchange program had a significant impact on the trajectories of all the IGMs: study abroad played a significant role in the trajectories of Ayuka, Arisa and Wakako and the presence of exchange students increased the diversity of the student body, which was central to the trajectories of Yamato, Akari, Wakako and Yuko. The curriculum also presented opportunities for the IGMs to develop the egocentric knowledge that was instrumental in extending knowledge of their social selves, particularly classes in sociology and anthropology, for Ayuka, Wakako and Yuko.

The interpersonal aspect of the social context also afforded and constrained the learner autonomy of the IGMs. All accounts referred to the supportive role played by friends and/or teachers in the learning trajectories. Opportunities for interaction with diverse others was a thread that ran through the accounts of Ayuka, Yamato, Akari, Wakako and Yuko. The interpersonal dynamics that led to the social inclusion and exclusion was a prominent theme in accounts of Wakako and Yuko. And participation and non-participation in CoPs was afforded by this interpersonal plane.

It is this social context that provided the horizons of significance (Taylor, 1991: 66) to the IGMs: through their experience in this context they were presented with ideas about possible ways of living and values to choose from.

Although less salient than those pertaining to the social context, affordances and constraints were also constituted in the physical aspects of the context. As Yuko pointed out, NLAU's small size and isolation intensify the social dynamics within, which play a role in the identity work of the IGMs. In addition, NLAU's proximity with agricultural land shaped some of Wakako and Arisa's most formative activities, and NLAU's proximity with nature motivated Arisa to live in Akita. It was this social and physical context that provided the IGMs with their critical experiences, which had a profound impact on their identities and their learner autonomy.

The way that the IGMs engaged with their context was influenced by affordances and constraints pertaining to the individual. The development of self-knowledge in response to critical experiences is dependent on a capacity for critical reflection. Then, there are emotional conditions on which the exercise of the autonomy competencies depends. These are self-worth, self-trust and self-respect (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000a). The IGMs generally exhibited these emotional conditions, but their importance was highlighted in Yuko's struggles with her sense of inferiority that resulted from her family background. It took time before she recognised the junjapa/non-junjapa dynamic as responsible for her social exclusion and take ownership of her non-junjapa identity, prior to that she attributed her exclusion to her perceived inferiority. Self-worth, self-trust and self-respect are a precondition for the dispassionate self-exploration necessary for the development of self-knowledge. Finally, the sociohistorical constitution of the IGMs influenced the capacities and emotional conditions described here and played a central role in the values and identities that they brought to NLAU, which needed to be reconciled with what they were confronted with in the NLAU context. In this way the individuals at NLAU, as well as other elements in NLAU, embody NLAU's interconnection with the world beyond it.

#### *4.8.6 Conclusion*

This chapter described and analysed the learning trajectories of the IGMs, as they represented them in the MNs and in the CNAs, and then interpreted them from the perspective of learner autonomy, in a way that I believe fulfilled the methodological criteria of rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, meaningful coherence and ethicality (described in subsection 3.2.5). It was clear that the learner autonomy of the IGMs was constituted in their relationship with their context (of which they were a part and consisted largely of people), and their context was not confined to NLAU; it included their study abroad contexts and activities outside of NLAU. As such, at the end of the chapter, we examined what their perspectives revealed about the way that their learner autonomy was afforded and constrained by their contexts, which provided us with an insight into forces that may affect the learner autonomy of NLAU students more broadly. It was also clear that historical context played a role equal to sociocultural and physical context. Considering these conclusions, I decided it was necessary to revise the secondary research questions for the proceeding phases of the project. The revised questions were:

1. How do NLAU students construct their identity in relation to their sociocultural, physical, and historical contexts?
2. How do they exercise control over these processes?
3. What are the affordances and constraints on these processes?

The next chapter details the Student-Led Inquiry (SLI), in which the inquiry group addressed the question of how learner autonomy manifests in NLAU more broadly, through inquiry, drawing on the perspectives of other NLAU students. In doing so, they deepened and broadened their perspectives on learner autonomy and how NLAU, as a place, afforded and constrained it. Documentation of this process helps to develop a more comprehensive understanding of NLAU as a place that affords and constrains learner autonomy.

# Chapter 5 – Learner autonomy in NLAU: an object and an outcome of Student- Led Inquiry

This chapter documents the work of the inquiry group after completing the Multimodal Narratives (MNs) and the Collaborative Narrative Analysis (CNA), in the Student-Led Inquiry (SLI). The aim of the SLI was to develop an understanding of learner autonomy at the level of NLAU as a place, through further collaborative interpretation of data yielded in the MNs and CNAs, and then by generating and interpreting additional data on the experiences of other NLAU students. This work is documented first, in part 5A. Then, in part 5B, the chapter examines the manifestations of the Inquiry Group Members' (IGMs') learner autonomy in the process of the inquiry through analysis and interpretation of all available data.

## 5A.1 Introduction to the Student-Led Inquiry account

This SLI phase of the project builds upon but moves beyond the IGMs' individual experiences of learner autonomy in NLAU, as represented in the last chapter, encouraging the inquiry group to take an increasingly abstract perspective on the processes involved in learner autonomy in NLAU. Like the last chapter, which focused on the individual trajectories of the IGMs, this part of the chapter seeks to address the overarching question of how learner autonomy is manifested in NLAU, by means of the secondary questions:

1. How do NLAU students construct their identity in relation to their sociocultural, physical, and historical contexts?
2. How do they exercise control over these processes?
3. What are the affordances and constraints on these processes?

These were not, however, the questions that oriented the inquiry group, partly because I had not yet defined them in those terms when the project commenced,

and partly because, as mentioned in section 3.4.1, I hoped to avoid technical language, and culturally loaded and ambiguous terms such as ‘identity’ and ‘autonomy’. Therefore, at the beginning of the inquiry, I provided the inquiry group with an orientation document that described this phase of the inquiry in the following terms:

“On the basis of [the CNA], you will begin to identify ways in which control is exercised over learning in NLAU and then the elements/agents that are influential in facilitating/suppressing control and agency. The outcomes of this analysis will then be translated into a conceptual representation of NLAU as a place where control is exercised over learning. This will be the seeds of a new theory. [...] In order to extend the range of our theory, we will use our conceptual model to inform further research. This will be ethnographic research, focused on gaining a deeper understanding of NLAU, in terms of whether or not and how students can exercise control over their own learning. This might include interviews with other members of the NLAU community, participant observations, visual research methodologies or other methods that meet our research requirements.”

This overview loosely structured the SLI. The resulting ‘conceptual representations’ give visible form to the group’s intersubjective understanding of learner autonomy in NLAU. My intention in this chapter is to privilege the voice of the students, meaning that I make every effort to present the analysis from the perspective of the participants. There are times when their perspective was unclear, which required interpretation. I attempt to make these interpretative processes transparent. There are also instances where I felt that, considering the sample size, they overstated their claims (perhaps due to their lack of professional research training); in such cases, I present them more tentatively than they were expressed by the inquiry group. In constructing this account, I present their conceptual representations and describe them and related conversations, drawing on records of their conversations, including my Field Notes (FNs) and videos and transcriptions (Vs) of the inquiry sessions. I also attempt to document the dialogue leading to methodological decisions made by the inquiry group in order to be transparent about how the data was generated, how the inquiry group justified

their choices and to demonstrate the autonomy exercised by the IGMs within the inquiry. In striking a balance between transparency, readability and consideration of the word limits of this thesis, compromises were inevitable and should be acknowledged as a component of my interpretive work.

The chapter is structured according to the stages of the research process (presented in figure 3.1), which proceeded as follows. The IGMs first worked alone between sessions, drawing on all of the MNs to produce Individual Conceptual Representations (ICRs) and then they shared these and worked together in the following sessions to produce Collaborative Conceptual Representations (CCRs). From the CCRs, the group generated research questions that they addressed through Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry (SLEI), the results of which broadened their perspective and enabled them to generalise further, leading to new conceptual representations; I term these Post Ethnography Collaborative Re-conceptualisations (PECRs). On the basis of this, the group was able to synthesise their analysis to draw conclusions and make recommendations to the administration of the university: the Synthesis and Recommendations (SRs).

As I explained in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), this cycle was completed twice, over two semesters: by Group 1 in the first semester and Group 2 in the second. As a reminder, Group 1 involved Ayuka, Arisa, Akari and Yamato's full participation, along with the intermittent participation of Wakako and Yuko. In this phase, Wakako and Yuko did not produce an MN or Individual Conceptual Representation (Gr1ICR), nor did they contribute to the Collaborative Conceptual Representations (Gr1CCRs) or conduct any ethnographic research (SLEI) (although they were involved in its planning), but they contributed to the Post-Ethnographic Collaborative Re-conceptualisations (Gr1PECRs) and the Synthesis and Recommendations (Gr1SR). In the following semester, Wakako and Yuko completed all phases; this is what I refer to as "Group 2". It is important to note that all of the conceptual work of Group 2 (Gr2ICR, Gr2CCR and Gr2PECR) was informed by and, therefore, builds on the research of Group 1.

Ultimately, Group 1 and 2 agreed that learner autonomy in NLAU is a process of active personal transformation, involving the discovery, development and

acceptance of the self, often leading to the recognition, appreciation and cultivation of their individuality. This process, they concluded, occurs when the self interacts with elements within NLAU and elements of society beyond, leading to transformative experiences that cause a reorganisation of the self. Transformative experiences, they found, often begin when students encounter a challenge arising from interaction between elements, which causes them to question and doubt themselves. They used the Japanese term, “zassetsu” to describe this phenomenon. Through dealing with zassetsu students become more aware of themselves – inquiring into their values (principles by which they feel they ought to live), their abilities and the limitations of their perspectives. This awareness alone constitutes a transformation of the self, but it can also lead to changes in values, broadening of perspectives and motivation to increase their abilities, thereby being an impetus for further transformation. They concluded that being aware of this process enables students to take control over it: to take control over the development of their self.

The remainder of this chapter elaborates these findings and documents how the inquiry groups came to them. The first stage was Group 1’s Individual Conceptual Representations (Gr1ICRs).

## 5A.2 Group 1’s Individual Conceptual Representations (Gr1ICRs)

This was the first stage in the inquiry group’s move from a focus on their own experiences to thinking more generally about processes involved in the autonomy of NLAU students. Here, they drew on their collective experiences, as represented in their MNs, to conceptualise the relationship between students and the NLAU context, in terms of learner autonomy. After session 5, in which Ayuka, Arisa, Yamato and Akari finished presenting and analysing their MNs, I provided them with the following instructions, which we clarified through dialogue:

“Each person will work individually to create a conceptual representation of the narrative analysis. This can be done in any mode or modes deemed most suitable for the purpose, but it must categorise ways of exercising



control over one's own learning and the elements that play a role in helping or hindering this process and show the relationships between them. These will be shared in the next session."

In session 6, Wakako and Yuko were on their teaching practicum and were, therefore, absent, but Ayuka, Arisa, Yamato and Akari were present. Arisa had not completed the task because she had left before the end of the previous session and had not received the instructions, but she drew her own interpretation of each of the others' diagrams in the session. I decided to include Arisa's interpretations in my discussion of each of the others' ICRs because they help to illustrate the developing intersubjectivity. Yamato completed an ICR, but unfortunately the diagram was lost, and I failed to photograph it; neither was it in his Multimodal Research Journal (MJR), he must have drawn it on a loose piece of paper. However, it is possible to discern what it depicted through Arisa's diagram, my FNs and the Vs. Therefore, I discuss Yamato's ICR on the basis of these.

#### *5A.2.1 Yamato's Individual Conceptual Representation (Gr1ICR1)*

Yamato explained that the main theme of his diagram was that students react to events in different ways according to their personalities and their histories. On the left was written "personalities and histories". To the immediate right was a box containing obstacles: "finding academic interests"; "frustration"; "personal issues"; "graduation requirements"; "study abroad concerns (such as being an outsider in the host country)". This box was connected to another box further to the right by red lines, which were drawn to indicate emotional reactions to the obstacles. This other box contained the results of overcoming the obstacles in the first box: "alteration of identity", "ideology and interests". He said that NLAU students learn by overcoming obstacles such as these, and that the way that they respond emotionally and subsequently deal with the obstacle depends on their "unique personalities and histories".

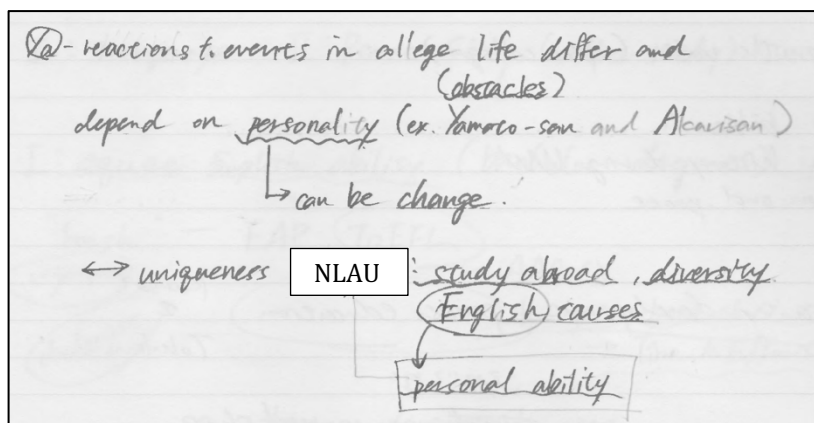


Figure 5.1. Arisa's interpretation of Yamato's Individual Conceptual Representation (Gr1ICR2)

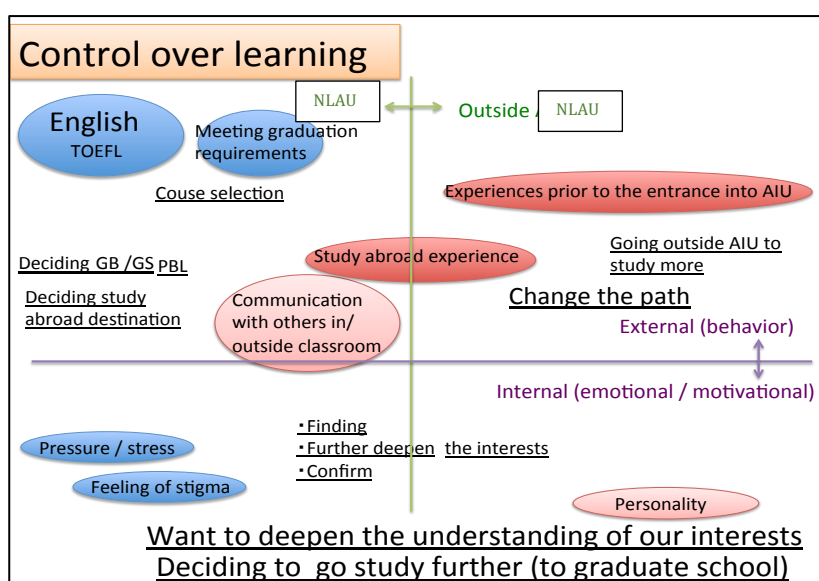


Figure 5.2. Ayuka's Individual Conceptual Representation (Gr1ICR3)

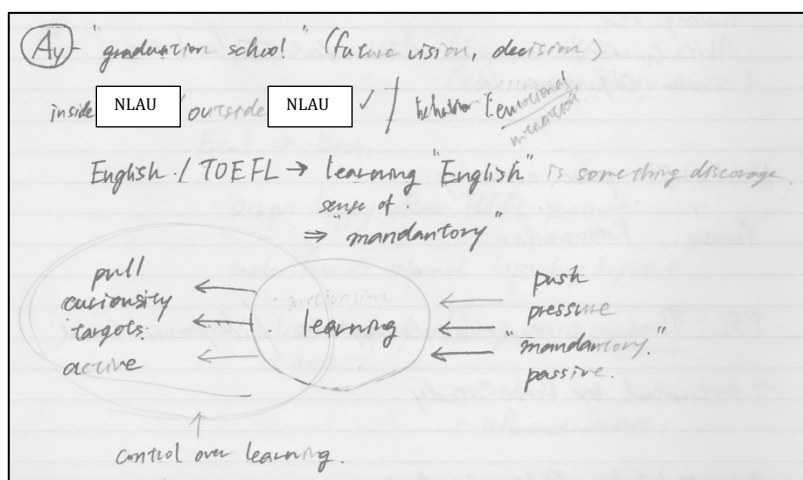


Figure 5.3. Arisa's interpretation of Ayuka's Individual Conceptual Representation (Gr1ICR4)

In discussing the diagram, Yamato wanted to point out that he felt that “personality [was] not something absolute, it can be changed” (V6 0:07:14) as a result of experience and that “NLAU has an enormous impact on students” (V6 0:07:53). In terms of NLAU’s impact on students, as we can see in Arisa’s diagram (see Figure 5.1), Yamato thought that the study abroad programme, the diversity of the student body and the prominent role of English in the social and academic lives of students were the most impactful. As was clear from their MNs, study abroad had had a significant impact on Ayuka and Arisa and he felt that English lay at the root of all of the emotional difficulties that had caused him to question his personality and lose his confidence. And due to the diversity of the student body and the resulting disparity of English levels he was sometimes caused to feel inferior. As he explained this, the others nodded vigorously in, what I interpreted as, wholehearted sympathy.

#### *5A.2.2 Ayuka’s Individual Conceptual Representation (Gr1ICR3)*

Ayuka, who was the second to present her ICR to the group (see Figure 5.2.), had used PowerPoint for its construction. She explained that the bubbles represented elements that influenced students’ control over their learning; the blue bubbles represented influences that motivated students’ learning but resulted in negative emotions; the red bubbles represented elements that motivated learning and were associated with positive emotions; and the pink bubbles affected learning but carried either both or neither positive and/nor negative emotions. The underlined phrases and sentences represent instances of students taking control over their learning, the size of the text indicates the significance of the action. The position of the bubbles and underlined phrases in relation to the green vertical line indicates its position in relation to NLAU (left of the green line for inside and right for outside, or over the line for both). Their position in relation to the purple horizontal line, Ayuka explained, indicates whether they are “internal”, referring to psychological phenomena, or “external”, referring to actions and elements in the environment.

Arisa's interpretation of Ayuka's ICR (see Figure 5.3) expands on the role of the positive and negative elements (indicated by the red and blue bubbles in Ayuka's ICR), making explicit that learning English and taking the TOEFL test are perceived negatively because they are "mandatory" and apply "pressure" that results in "passive" learning, whereas learning that is motivated by "curiosity" and personal "targets" result in "active" learning, and it is here that the student exercises control over their learning.

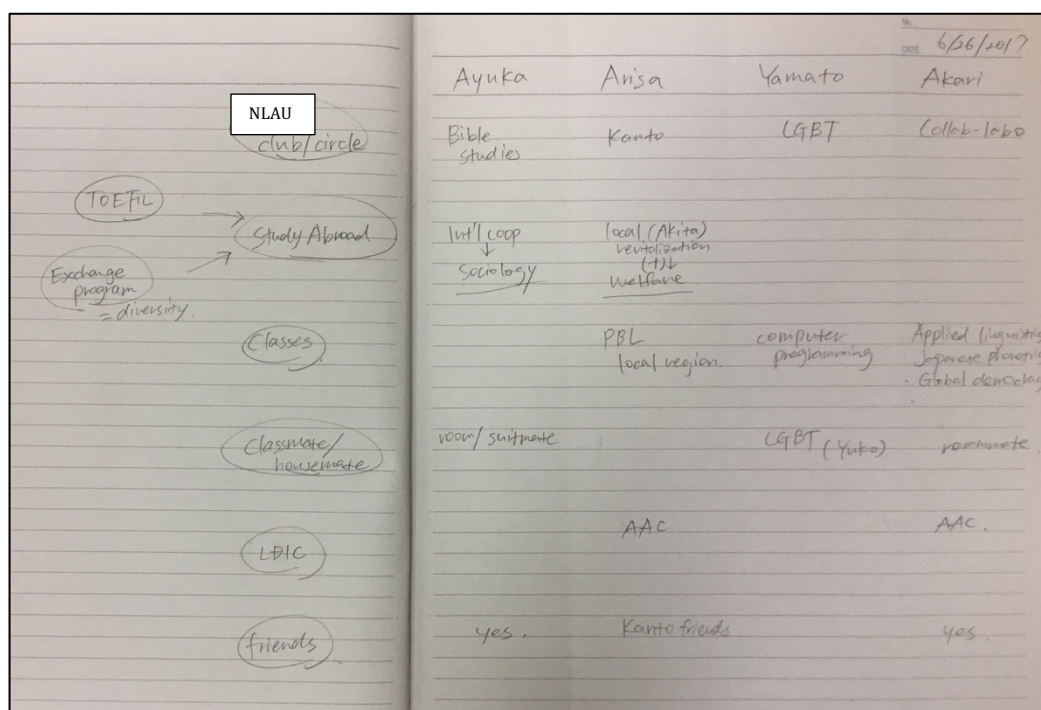


Figure 5.4. Akari's Individual Conceptual Representation (Gr1ICR5)

① - Everything related with English  
 → English ability is different among students  
 we need to care about GPA, TOEFL (before Study abroad)

Figure 5.5. Arisa's interpretation of Akari's ICR (Gr1ICR6)

### *5A.2.3 Akari's Individual Conceptual Representations (Gr1ICR5)*

Akari was the next to share her ICR (see Figure 5.4). She described it as “kind of a list” (V6 0:22:15) that identifies the elements that affect student’s control over their learning in NLAU. The bubbles down the left side are elements of NLAU that impact the learner autonomy of the students. Since it may be a little difficult to read, I list them here: NLAU clubs and circles; TOEFL and exchange programme, resulting in diversity and feeding into study abroad; classes; classmates and housemates; LDIC; and friends. To the right of this, the diagram indicates how each factor influences each of the participants. Speaking about her ICR, Akari said that she thought that English underlay everything, since the study abroad programme is the main part of the curriculum. She stated that the study abroad programme drives all learning in the early stages of NLAU because students must attain the required TOEFL score and GPA. This point is emphasised in Arisa’s interpretation, seen in Figure 5. Akari also made the point that the exchange programme is responsible for the diversity in the classes, with international students learning alongside the Japanese students. The presence of these international students makes Japanese students nervous about speaking English; even if they have little problem with their TOEFL, the disparity between their level of English and that of the international students is very wide, she said.

### *5A.2.4 Summary of Group 1's Individual Conceptual Representations*

Here I summarise the elements that impact NLAU students’ learner autonomy, relationships and processes involved in NLAU students’ learner autonomy and manifestations of learner autonomy in NLAU. I present them in the categories in which they were presented by the participants. Correspondingly, I make no attempt of my own to categorise them at this point.

Elements that impact NLAU students’ learner autonomy:

- Experiences prior to entering NLAU (Gr1ICR1 and 3)
- Personalities (Gr1ICR1, 2 and 3)
- Personal issues (Gr1ICR1)

- Study abroad (Gr1ICR1, 2, 3 and 5)
- Exchange program (Gr1ICR5)
- English requirements and TOEFL (Gr1ICR3, 5 and 6)
- Clubs and circles (Gr1ICR5)
- Pressure to meet graduate requirements (Gr1ICR1 and 3)
- Pressure and stress caused by the NLAU curriculum (Gr1ICR3)
- Feelings of stigma (Gr1ICR3)
- Communication with others in and out of class (Gr1ICR3)
- Diversity of the student body (Gr1ICR1,2 and 5)
- Classmates (Gr1ICR5)
- Roommates (Gr1ICR5)
- Friends (Gr1ICR5)
- LDIC (Gr1ICR5)

Relationships and processes involved in NLAU students' learner autonomy:

- Reactions to events depend on personality and personal histories (Gr1ICR1)
- Individual students encounter diverse others with better English, which leads some to feel inferior. Overcoming these feelings of inferiority results in growth (Gr1ICR1)
- Mandatory tasks are discouraging and push learning – learning is reactive and passive (Gr1ICR3 and 4)
- Personal interests pull learning and result in learner autonomy (Gr1ICR3 and 4)
- The exchange program is responsible for the diversity of the student body and the study abroad programme, which is responsible for the pressure of TOEFL and the role of English in NLAU (Gr1ICR5 and 6)

Manifestations of learner autonomy in NLAU:

- Alteration of identity, ideology and interests (Gr1ICR1)
- Change personality (Gr1ICR1)
- Course selection (Gr1ICR3)
- Deciding major (Gr1ICR3)

- Whether to do PBL and which one (Gr1ICR3)
- Deciding study abroad destination (Gr1ICR3)
- Going outside NLAU to study more (Gr1ICR3)
- Change path (Gr1ICR3)
- Finding, deepening and confirming interests (Gr1ICR3)
- Seeking to understand more about interests (Gr1ICR3)
- Deciding to study further (e.g. Graduate school) (Gr1ICR3)

### 5A.3 Group 1's Collaborative Conceptual Representation (Gr1CCR)

In this stage the inquiry group drew on all of their ICRs to create their Gr1CCRs. In doing so, they combined their conceptual insights, derived from their combined experiences of learning in NLAU, thereby deepening and broadening their intersubjective perspective on the phenomenon in question – learner autonomy in NLAU. Here I detail how they did this and discuss the representations that they produced.

After sharing their ICRs, the remainder of the sixth session was spent with Ayuka, Arisa, Yamato and Akari working together to produce the Gr1CCRs. I gave them and clarified through dialogue the following instructions:

“This representation will be done together as a group. You will draw on all the Individual Conceptual Representations of the group to create single representation of NLAU as a place where students can (or can't) exercise control over their own learning. It should include the **ways** in which individuals exercise control over their learning and what are the elements that **influence** this process (whether people, things, events, experiences or any other thing that may play a role). The ‘place’ of NLAU need not be limited to the physical campus area, it may also include NLAU related activities that are done off campus, such as study abroad or work placements. The representation can be done in any mode or modes, this is

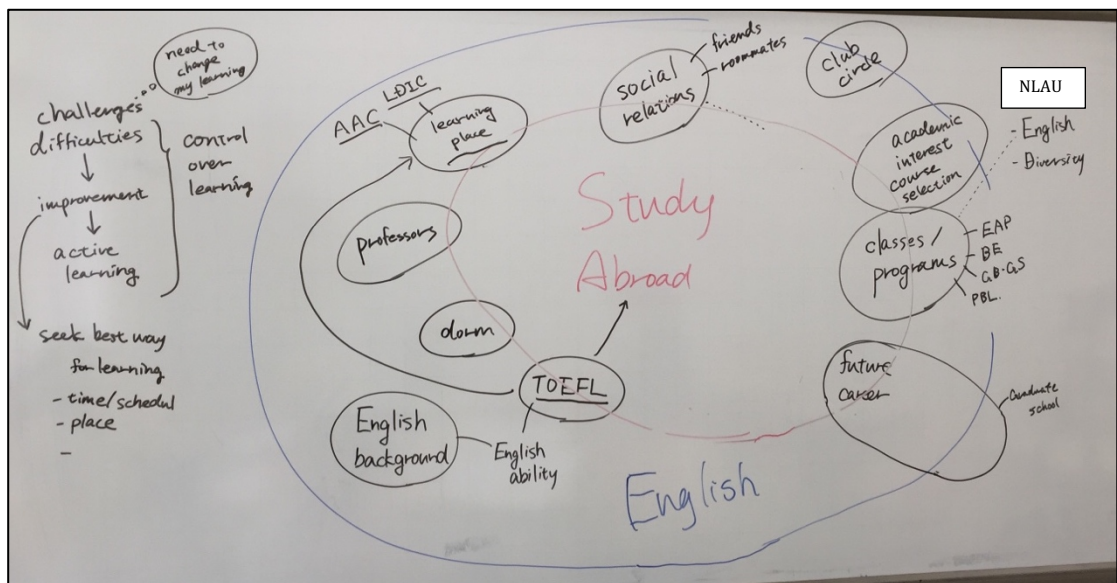


Figure 5.6. Group 1's Collaborative Conceptual Representation (Gr1CCR)

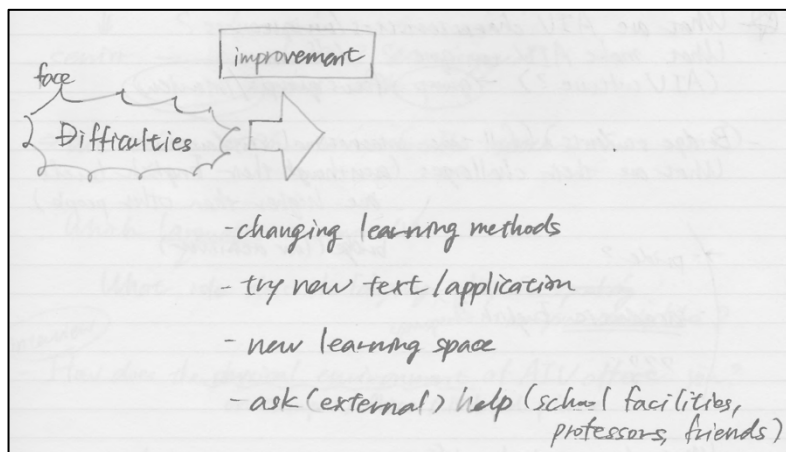


Figure 5.7. Arisa's interpretation of the learning process part of the Collaborative Conceptual Representation



one of the decisions you will make as a group. If you need any special materials, discuss this with Joe.”

I had brought large pieces of paper and pens of multiple colours, scissors and glue, and told them I could get other materials if they needed them; but after a brief consultation the group decided to use the whiteboard that was in the classroom that I had reserved for the purpose. After some discussion about how to approach the task, Arisa went to the board and together - after much discussion, drawing, erasing and redrawing - they produced their Gr1CCR (see Figure 5.6). The large circular diagram to the right represents the elements that influence the learning trajectories of NLAU students, as the group conceived them at this point. The two large concentric circles represent the primary elements, and the smaller black bubbles represent the secondary elements positioned so as to represent their relationship with the two primary elements. “Study abroad” was placed in the centre for two reasons. Firstly, as Yamato put it: “study abroad is the primary goal for many NLAU students. Study abroad has the power to regulate students’ behaviour, at least until they determine their host institution” (V6 48:59). However, neither Yamato nor Akari had completed their study abroad at this point, which gives them a different perspective to Ayuka and Arisa. For Ayuka and Arisa, it was clear from their MNs that it was the experiences they had while on their study abroad that had had the greatest impact on them. In this way, we can see that study abroad is, both, a form of extrinsic motivation (for those who are yet to qualify) and a source of impactful experiences. “English” was placed in the outer circle because it is seen to pervade life in NLAU, underlying the social and academic lives of the students.

On the left of the diagram is their representation of the learning process, also represented by Arisa in figure 5.7. They saw the challenges or difficulties presented by the environment of NLAU as the (potential) prompt for students to take control over their learning, causing them to change their learning methods, try new materials, find new places to learn and seek help if necessary.

The Gr1CCR produced in this phase is a manifestation of the inquiry group’s intersubjective perspective on learner autonomy in NLAU, resulting from the

participants sharing their interpretations of their combined experiences of learning in NLAU. In order to broaden their perspective and deepen their conceptual understanding, the group required data on the experiences of other students. To this end, they conducted the Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry (Gr1SLEI), which will be the focus of the next section.

## 5A.4 Group 1's Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry (Gr1SLEI)

Between sessions 7 and 10, Group 1 worked on their SLEI - deriving research questions from the Gr1CCR, developing and carrying out methods for addressing them and sharing and analysing their data. In session 7, all members were in attendance. Ayuka, Arisa, Yamato and Akari shared the Gr1CCR with Wakako and Yuko, and together, drawing on this, they planned their SLEI. I provided them with the following instructions, which we clarified through dialogue:

“The [CCR] may give you some understanding of the forces that shape the learning journey of individuals in NLAU. Think about what questions you might explore in order to gain a deeper understanding of learning in NLAU (emphasising learners taking control of their own learning). [...]

Then think about how you could explore these questions, using qualitative methods. Consider the following:

- What are the most appropriate methods for exploring the questions?
- If this research will involve other people, who would be the most appropriate people to use?
- What do you need to do before you can begin collecting the data?”

After about an hour of discussion, the group decided on the following research questions:

- What is unique about NLAU other than English?
- What are the biggest obstacles for students besides classes?
- What is it that makes some seniors hate NLAU and others love it?
- How did students manage their challenges?

- How do students relate NLAU to “normal” society?
- What elements or factors motivate or affect students’ study?
- How (in what languages) do the students communicate in their daily life?
- What role do the languages that they speak (whether English, Japanese or other) play in their daily lives, including thinking, speaking writing etc.?

After considering a number of qualitative methods, they decided that semi-structured interviews would be the most effective way of addressing the research questions. I helped them to understand that simply asking their interviewees the research question would probably fail to yield the results that we were hoping for. They would, therefore, need to phrase questions indirectly so that interviewees would reveal their perspectives on the issues covered by the research questions without being led in a way that reflects the preconceptions of the interviewers. They eventually decided on the following interview schedule, which they then translated into Japanese for use in the interviews:

1. Do you think NLAU is unique?
2. Did you have any difficulties inside and outside class? If so, how did you cope with them?
3. What motivated or demotivated your learning in NLAU?
4. Do you feel any frustration switching between languages?
5. What do you think about the environment of NLAU? (Here they emphasised that they had left this question open and did not lead them with examples, etc.)
6. Do you have any concerns or worries about life after NLAU?

We also discussed ethical concerns such as ensuring that participation is voluntary, the importance of gaining informed consent before the commencement of their interviews and preserving the anonymity of the interviewees. When prompted to think about sampling, they decided senior students would be most appropriate for the same reason that I favoured senior students for participation in my project – they had experienced all phases of NLAU life. They thought the

following eight categories gave a comprehensive cross section of the NLAU community:

- Degree-seeking international students
- Students who had been in the Bridge Programme
- Students who had started in EAP1
- Students who had started in EAP2
- Students who had started in EAP3
- Super-seniors (a term coined by NLAU students to describe students who have not graduated after the typical four years)
- Exchange students
- Mature students

Wakako and Yuko opted not to participate in carrying out the research because by this point they had already decided that they would continue in the following semester. The other four spent one week interviewing students from each category. They conducted all interviews and took notes in Japanese.

In the next session (the eighth), all were in attendance again. Ayuka had interviewed two students, Yamato one, Arisa three and Akari had interviewed six. They told me that their interviews had lasted between forty and ninety minutes. They had taken detailed notes on their interview schedules (see Appendix 5.1 for a sample) and had recorded those whose interviewees gave permission. It took the next three sessions to share all of what they found. After some discussion about the best way to share their findings, they decided that it would be most efficient to report each interview, one after another and write each as a “kind of narrative” (Akari in V8) of the interview that covered the answers to each question, on the board (see Appendix 5.2 for an example). I present a summary of each interviewee in Appendix 5.3 and an overview in the table 5.1 below.

	<p><b>Overview of answers</b></p> <p>“I(n)” indicates the interviewee number</p>
<p><b>Unique points of NLAU</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The personality of students who come to NLAU (I1)</li> <li>• The diversity of the backgrounds and motivations of students (I2, I5, I6, I9)</li> <li>• The English medium environment (I3, I5, I7, I8)</li> <li>• Small class-size (I3)</li> <li>• The study-centric environment (I3)</li> <li>• The isolated, mountainous location (I4)</li> <li>• 24-hour facilities (I7)</li> <li>• No security gate (I7)</li> <li>• Liberal arts curriculum (I8)</li> <li>• Study abroad programme (I8, I9)</li> <li>• The international environment (I9)</li> <li>• It is relatively free from convention because it is new, which makes it more flexible and agile in responding to challenges (I10)</li> <li>• The students are tolerant and interested in foreigners (I11)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Difficulties experienced by NLAU students</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling inferior to students with greater English experience and competence (I1, I2, I5)</li> <li>• Maintaining relationships with people with different values, especially for people from minority religions, such as Christianity (I2)</li> <li>• Time management (I3, I5)</li> <li>• Reaching the requisite TOEFL score (I3, I4)</li> <li>• Financial difficulties (I4)</li> <li>• The mature student wanted to avoid being a bad influence on the freshman students (I7)</li> <li>• Students whose first language is not Japanese can struggle to make friends and communicate with people in the community (I8, I11)</li> <li>• Degree-seeking students who are the sole representative of their country have no mentors (I8)</li> <li>• Japanese students who spent significant time abroad (kikokushijo) find it difficult to live up to expectations on their Japanese linguistic and cultural competence (I9, I12)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some students feel their introversion makes them ill-suited to NLAU (I10)</li> <li>• Students can struggle to learn a third language (I10)</li> <li>• International degree seeking-students whose mother tongue is not English can feel excluded because Japanese students only want to invest time on friendships with each other or with English speakers (I11)</li> </ul>
<b>How they coped with their difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek support from friends (I2, I4)</li> <li>• Take a leave of absence to develop skills that improve life in NLAU (I5, I6)</li> <li>• Accept their individuality in the face of pressure to live up to the expectations of others (I9)</li> <li>• Work hard to gain the required skills (I11)</li> </ul>
<b>What motivated or demotivated your learning in NLAU?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part-time work which gave the student a sense of control (I1)</li> <li>• Learning to understand diverse others was motivating (I2)</li> <li>• Curricular requirements were motivating (I3)</li> <li>• Money was a motivator (I4)</li> <li>• Peers, who are highly motivated and competent were motivating (I6)</li> <li>• Being interested in aspects of the curriculum motivated learning (I7)</li> <li>• Feeling the need to be prepared for intellectual activities motivated learning (I7)</li> <li>• Career aspirations motivated learning (I8)</li> <li>• Those whose mother tongue is not Japanese are motivated to become able to communicate with Japanese people (I8, I11)</li> <li>• The desire to show gratitude to parents was a motivator (I8)</li> <li>• The desire to excel in class was a motivator (I9)</li> <li>• Clubs were a motivator (I10)</li> </ul>
<b>Do you feel any frustration switching between languages?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the beginning, some students felt their English was inferior, but not at the time of the interview (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6)</li> <li>• Students can find language acquisition difficult (I6)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The transition between English learned in Japanese schools and communicative English can be hard (I7)</li> <li>• Switching between three languages can be hard (I8)</li> <li>• Students who have significant bilingual experience can be more comfortable in an environment where they can use two languages than one where only one language is used (I9, I10)</li> </ul>
<b>What do you think about the environment of NLAU? (Here they emphasised that they had left this question open and did not lead them with examples, etc.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent for study due to the lack of distractions (I1, I3, I10)</li> <li>• Small size of community and campus and the diversity of its students mean that students are forced to foster and maintain relationships with diverse others, which increases tolerance and broadens perspectives (I2)</li> <li>• Supportive and encourages exploration, which increases confidence in students (I3)</li> <li>• Insufficient dormitory numbers are a problem (I4)</li> <li>• The NLAU environment successfully facilitates communication among students (I6)</li> <li>• The isolated location of the university makes communication with people outside it difficult, and NLAU could do more to facilitate this (I6, I12)</li> <li>• The rural location is enjoyable (I7, I8, I11)</li> <li>• The facilities are good (I7, I12)</li> <li>• Some feel the administration staff are incompetent (I7)</li> <li>• The isolation makes it inconvenient (I8)</li> <li>• Some are comfortable in the bilingual environment (I9)</li> <li>• The small community and close relationships between faculty and students are good (I10)</li> <li>• Japanese students often avoid interacting with international students (I11)</li> <li>• Some find that classes are too general (I11)</li> <li>• Some wish there were more sports and arts classes (I11)</li> <li>• Some think that classes are too easy for international students (I11)</li> </ul>
<b>Do you have any concerns or worries about life after NLAU?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many were concerned for the future of NLAU (I6, I7, I8, I10 <i>and the co-researchers said that many of them said this though did not specify which ones – this is a result of the financial difficulties that NLAU was reportedly dealing with at the time</i>)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding work (I8, I11)</li> <li>• Some worry that their Japanese linguistic and cultural competences are compromised by their international experience, which may make it harder to get jobs (I9)</li> <li>• Some worry that their Japanese language skills will be insufficient for the Japanese workplace (I12)</li> </ul>
<b>Additional comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most significant learning occurs through relationships with diverse others, it was a “really deep experience” (I2)</li> <li>• NLAU life is meaningful (I4)</li> </ul>

Table 5.1. Summary of interviews in Gr2SLEI

These insights into the experiences of other students gained from their SLEI deepened and broadened the inquiry group’s perspective on the research focus and informed a number of Gr1PECRs. These are presented and discussed in the next section.

## 5A.5 Group 1’s Post-Ethnography Collaborative Re-conceptualisation (Gr1PECR)

In the tenth session, all members of the group were in attendance and once Ayuka had finished sharing the last of the interview data, I introduced the task of creating the Gr1PECR. I asked them to look again at the Gr1CCR they had produced before conducting their SLEI along with their interview data and consider what changes to make to ensure that it reflected their new perspective, informed by the experiences of their interviewees. It proved difficult to represent all aspects of learner autonomy in the context of NLAU in a single diagram, so the process resulted in a number of diagrams, each capturing different aspects. Three were completed in Session 10 (Gr1PECR1 (figure 5.8), Gr1PECR2 (figure 5.9) and Gr1PECR3 (figure 5.10), two in Session 11 (Gr1PECR5 and Gr1PECR6) and four were completed between sessions 11 and 12 by Ayuka, Yamato, Arisa and Akari for their report, assigned for their methodologies class (Gr1PECR4 ) (figure 5.11) and those seen in Appendix 5.4). The differences between the CCR and the PECRs mark



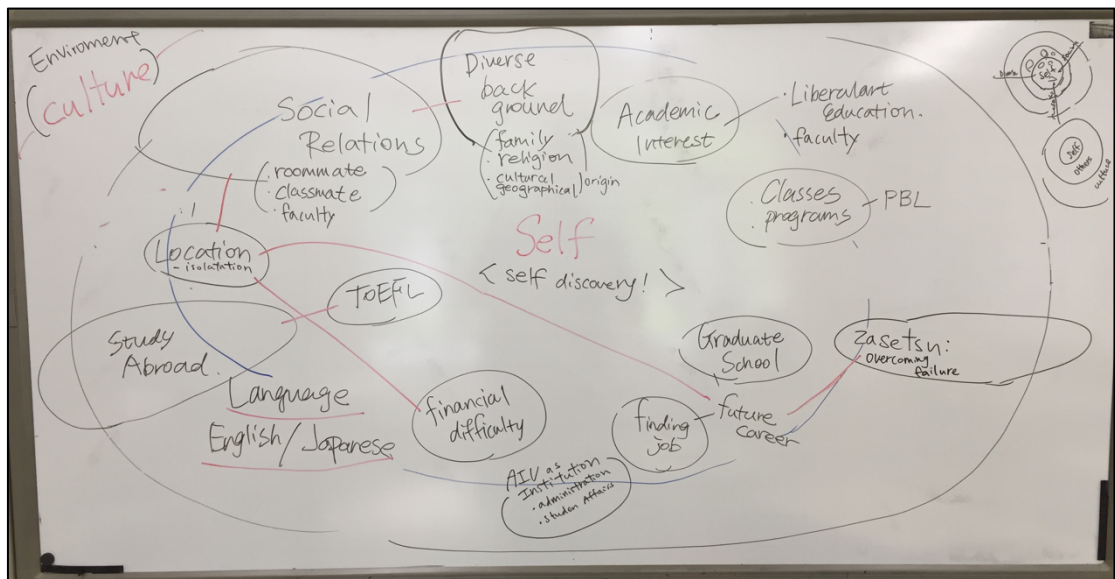


Figure 5.8. Gr1PECR1

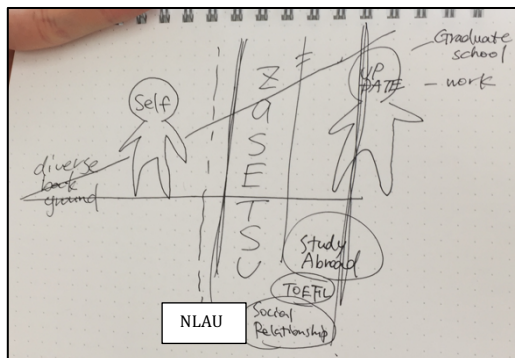


Figure 5.9. Gr1PECR2



Figure 5.10. Gr1PECR3

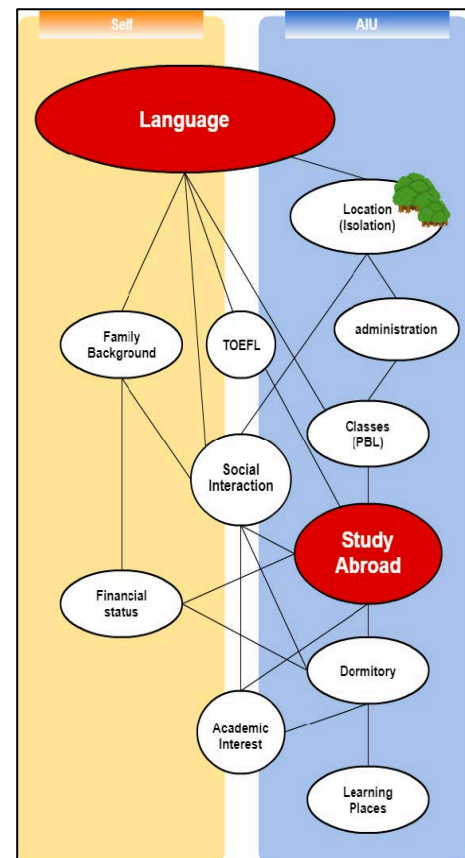


Figure 5.11. Gr1PECR4, submitted in Yamato, Ayuka, Arisa and Akari's

a development in thinking that places at its centre the self and the way that it develops as a result of interacting with elements in the NLAU environment.

As a starting point, Akari redrew the Gr1CCR on the board and then they pored over the interview data. Then, with Yuko taking over the drawing, they produced their first diagram by making adjustments to Gr1CCR (Gr1PECR1, as seen in figure 5.8). As you can see, the minor elements “financial difficulties”, “social relations”, “academic interests”, “classes and programs”, “future career”, “TOEFL” and “diversity” remained, as did the representation of their relationship with the major elements by their relative position. However, there were a number of revisions, some significant, others minor. Perhaps the most significant change was the subordination of “study abroad” to a minor element and its replacement with “self” and “self-discovery” as the central element. They reasoned that the interviewees had hardly mentioned study abroad (although Wakako pointed out that this may be down to how the questions had been framed) and that it was the self that lay at the centre of the learning process and that self-discovery seemed to be a major part of the learning that had been discussed by both the IGMs in their MNs and the interviewees. I find this change to be significant because it explicitly connects the individual and their learning to their context.

There were also a number of relatively minor changes. A ring labelled “environment” and “culture” was added to the outside and the “English” ring was renamed “English/Japanese/Language”, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the student body. Together these rings represent the relationship between the students’ selves and the cultural environment, which is mediated by the languages that the students use. There were also some changes made to some of the minor elements: “diversity” and “future career” were elaborated to reflect what was specified in the interview data. Some new minor elements were also added - “zassetsu”, “location/isolation” and “NLAU as an institution – administration, student affairs” – and some were omitted: “learning spaces” and “dorms”.

This diagram signifies a shift to a more holistic conception of learner autonomy, aligning with the sociocultural conception described in section 2.3. The diagram explicitly integrated the learning process within the relationship between the

individual and the NLAU environment as a result of these changes. It defines learning as a process of self-discovery, resulting from the interaction between the self and the environment/culture, by means of language. As in the Gr1CCR, the black bubbles specify the elements at play in this process. Yuko began to connect up some of the elements to show their relationship, but she stopped, realising that she would have to connect everything. Here they started to see the limitations of this shape, realising that it could not express all that they wished to express (the small circular diagrams in the top right corner are Yuko's experiments with alternative shapes that were not pursued).

At this point, Akari produced a diagram that she had written in her notebook while Yuko was at the board, Gr1PECR2 (see figure 5.9). Gr1PECR2, they acknowledged, does not show the way that the individual interacts with their environment, but it is illustrative of what they saw as one of the primary learning processes in NLAU – “overcoming zassetsu”. Akari explained it as follows: “first they have individual background and the self enters NLAU; this range is zassetsu and these are the factors involved for... social relationship... after they overcome something, they upgraded by themselves, then they have self-esteem or confidence” (Akari, V10, 1:08:10). I complemented Akari on the contribution her diagram made to our understanding of the learning process before reminding the group that our focus was on learner autonomy in context. I commented that it would be a pity to lose fine-grained detail of the way that specific aspects of the context influenced the students. They duly returned to Gr1PECR1 examine the relationship between learner autonomy and its relationship with the NLAU context.

Then began what turned out to be recurring theoretical disagreement between Yuko on the one hand, and Akari, Ayuka, Arisa and Yamato on the other (Wakako remained noncommittal on the subject): the reach of the concept of culture. First, Yuko sought to erase the “language, Japanese/English” circle because she argued it could be subordinated to “environment/culture”. Ayuka disagreed and I pointed out that many of the interviewees had referred to linguistic challenges. This prompted Akari to ask Yuko what she meant by culture, to which she responded, “everything” (V10 1:11:05), before adding that it can include language and social relations, but they cannot be separated from culture. Akari argued that the

common language was a key factor in the learning experiences of many of the interviewees (I would also add here that issues of language featured prominently in the MNs). Then she questioned the validity of conflating culture and environment pointing to the impact NLAU's location has on its students, which prompted discussion on whether environment should be subordinated to culture or vice versa. Yuko advocated the former and others leaned towards the latter. Yamato commented that they had not specified what was meant by environment in their interviews. I responded that this meant that we could refer to the way that the interviewees conceived the environment to deal with the impasse, since it was their frame of reference that we were trying to represent. Gr1PECR3 (seen in figure 5.10) was the result of this exercise. The session ended with no consensus on the reach of the concept of culture. Between this session and the next, Ayuka, Arisa, Yamato and Akari had to complete and present their research assigned by the methodology class, so they met independently to develop Gr1PECR4 (as seen in figure 5.11), which they presented in the next session.

In session 11, all members were present. In presenting their Gr1PECR4, Akari said they had toyed with a few ideas, which she had sketched in her notebook (see Appendix 5.4); she said it had been very difficult to capture the complexity of their findings in a way that was clear enough to understand. Ayuka concurred that they had struggled a lot, but they had finally agreed on Gr1PECR4. She projected it onto the screen and Arisa explained it. She began by saying that there were so many factors that influenced control over learning in NLAU. She explained that they had categorised them into 'self' and 'NLAU', and that they still thought that language and study abroad had a big impact on the life of NLAU students. She added that the 'self' category included factors that were related to the individual, like family, financial status or language background. But the self is also influenced by the 'NLAU' category, including facilities, classes, dorms and learning places, she said. TOEFL, social interaction and academic interests are in the middle because they are shaped by individual motivation and personal interests on the one hand, but on the other they are controlled by NLAU, she explained; for instance, social interaction is shaped by dorms and classes, and academic interests are affected by dormitory life and study abroad and both are the result of the actions and choices of individuals. Akari explained that they wanted to show every single element and

how they were related to each other. Wakako asked if the vertical position signified some kind of order; they replied that it did not.

I complemented Ayuka, Akari, Arisa and Yamato on their success in conveying something so complex in such simple terms. Yuko then pointed out that it said a lot about the NLAU environment and some things about the way that the students interact with it, but it said nothing about the way that students exercise control over their learning. I agreed with this. Akari replied that this was surplus to the requirements of their coursework and Ayuka said that they had discussed this but had been confused about the degree to which they should generalise because each student, including themselves, had different ways of exercising control over their learning. To this I responded that it may be possible to find similarities across the students if we thought in more abstract terms. This prompted them to return to their interview data, A3 copies of which I had placed on the table and consider themes that might unify their own autonomous learning behaviours and those of their informants.

Their discussion, with Yuko at the board, resulted in Gr1PECR5 (as seen in figure 5.12). The terms in red boxes, on the left – “discovering self”, “developing self”, “self-acceptance” and “taking action” - are four concepts that the group felt encompass all the ways that NLAU students, themselves included, exercised their learner autonomy. The labels to the left of the boxed terms indicate that they saw ‘self-discovery’ as a cognitive change, ‘self-development’ as exercising control over the self and ‘self-acceptance’ as finding balance, or an equilibrium. I should note that they made no claim that all students undergo these processes. Furthermore, although they presented it as a flowchart, as if it is a process that students move through sequentially, their conversations made it clear that most cases did not evidence progression through all phases, and they didn’t necessarily follow the same order if they did. For instance, Ayuka said:

“When I think about my own narrative, I can’t say that I ‘discovered’ my interests. I think it’s more like... not discovering but developing [...] because what I have now wasn’t in me before, like before entering NLAU I was

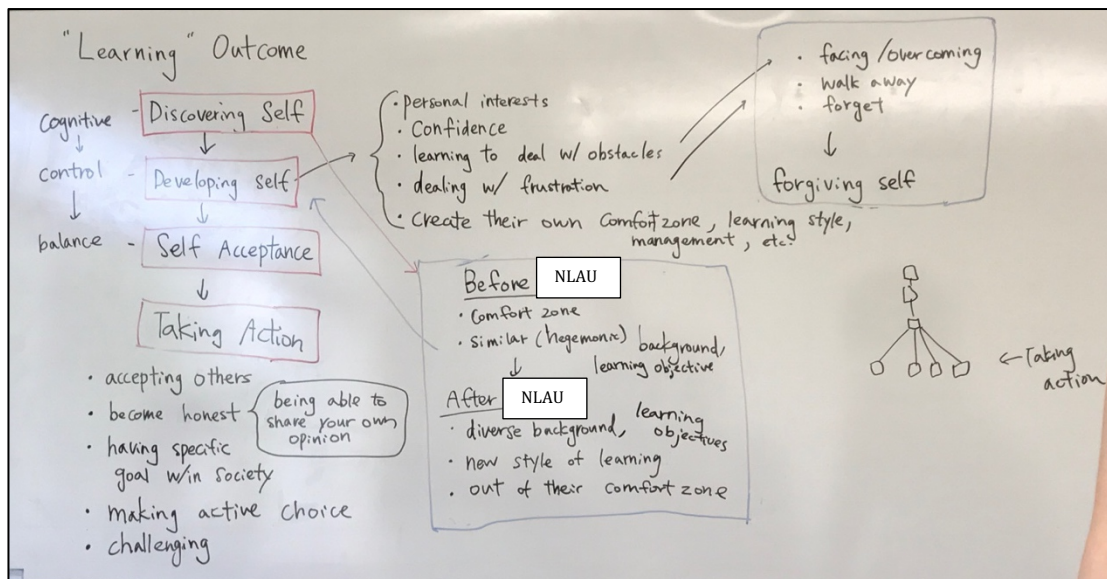


Figure 5.12. Gr1PECR5

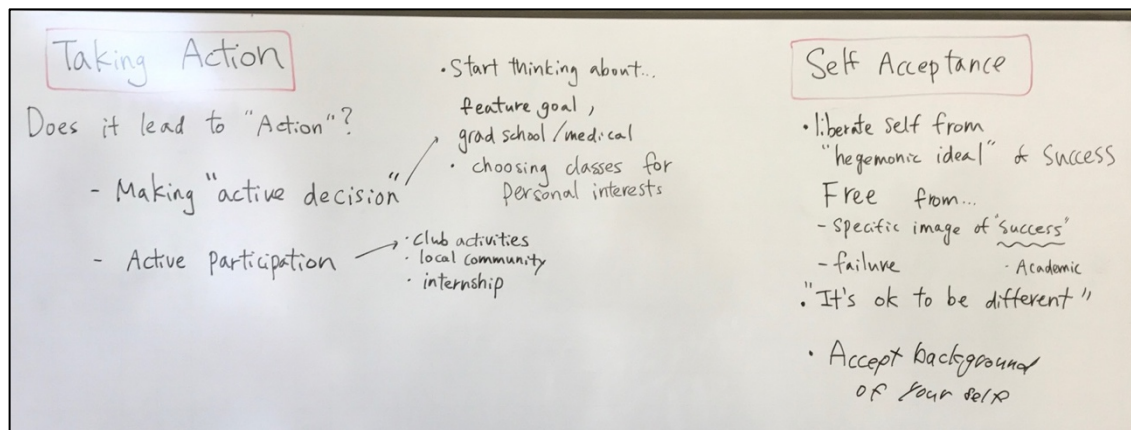


Figure 5.13. Gr1PECR6

different, and I didn't have that. So, it's not like discovered" (V11, 31:20).

Nevertheless, they agreed that "taking action" could not precede the other three, causing me to interpret it as 'taking *authentic* action'; a point I will develop later. An additional pertinent point that came out of their conversations and is not visible in the diagram is that they conceived this as an iterative process, a cycle through which students (might) pass numerous times. A significant part of the synthesis of their data analysis and theoretical contribution lies in this PECR so I will give it the attention it deserves below.

Self-discovery, the group concluded, resulted from students leaving the comfort of their pre-NLAU life, where they were (in many cases) surrounded by people with socioeconomic, cultural and educational backgrounds similar to their own. On arriving in the diverse community of NLAU, noting that others are different to them makes salient aspects of their selves that had previously gone unnoticed in their homogeneous pre-NLAU milieu. Or, as Akari put it:

"Before entering this university, students were in the comfort zone because the place where they grew up was maybe their peers, or their relatives or their family, they tend to have similar circumstances, the financial background, educational background, they go to same high school, they kinda same [...]. So they can share certain value or common sense, but after coming here, there [are] students from various regions of Japan or foreign country, so they realise THEY are different from me (V11, 47:00)."

The PECR shows that the social, psychological and academic challenges of this new environment can force self-development. By becoming able to participate successfully in NLAU life, through adapting to the new educational environment and learning to deal with obstacles, students extend their comfort zone and become more confident. Akari provides an example of how this can occur in a continuation from her previous statement:

"So, they have to accept, students have to accept the difference and they have to make new comfortable place, so I think that...mmm... how can I

say... When I started working, I feel the company's culture is totally different from my value and it was really difficult to deal with the relationships within the company, so I tried to make my comfortableness, my place in the company. So, I think the NLAU students do a same or similar thing at NLAU. They make a comfortable place, a comfortable relationship, comfortable management of learning or... they need to create their own something, their own learning strategies or organisations or ... it's my comment" (V11, 47:00)

As is indicated on the Gr1PECR5, in addition to adapting to the environment, becoming more self-aware enables them to discover new interests that they can then develop. In doing so they take ownership of their self-development.

They elaborated on 'self-acceptance', along with 'taking action', in the Gr1PECR6 (as seen in figure 5.13), but the initial prompt for including it in Gr1PECR5 was that many students initially felt inferior, either to others or to the demands of the academic environment. To some extent, the cure for this was to develop their abilities in order to better compete with their peers or meet NLAU's academic demands. However, some obstacles were insurmountable; in such cases, some were gradually become able to accept their limitations and embrace them as a part of their individuality. This definition of 'self-acceptance' as accepting their individuality was developed further in Gr1PECR6. Being exposed to alternative values in the people around them affects students in a number of ways.

Ayuka said that through seeing such differences between people, she saw that it was "OK to be different", causing her to embrace her individuality. The others indicated that this resonated with them. She said that if she had gone to a university with a community of people more similar to her, she might not have "broken her typical way of thinking" (V11, 1:22:45).

Yamato said that he felt that his experiences at NLAU had helped him to see a broader range of possibilities for his future. Before arriving at NLAU he had an image of success of passing smoothly through NLAU, graduating after four years and getting a well-paid, secure job, which caused him to focus on maintaining a high GPA, rather than taking courses that interested him. Life at NLAU, however,



showed him other paths, such as going to graduate school; “I got liberated”, he said (V11, 1:16:00). This prompted discussion about what he had been liberated from – his image of success, they concluded – and how he had acquired this. The group agreed that this narrow image of success - getting a secure, well-paid job – is the standard belief in Japan, but Yamato was reluctant to accept he had inherited it from society. Nevertheless, the others clearly thought that he had and that people generally do. Yuko thought this was a result of hegemony, thus the label of “liberate self from ‘hegemonic ideal’ of success” on Gr1PECR6. When asked how she was using the term, ‘hegemony’, she answered that she was referring to the way that high school students are shaped by the same cultural forces as one another, because they all have similar backgrounds and take for granted the values and learning objectives that come with them.

Akari thought that the diversity of NLAU often forced students to make peace with their background. She had already completed a two-year college course before coming to NLAU, which was much more homogeneous in terms of students’ backgrounds, so I asked her whether the diversity of NLAU made it more challenging or just different, she answered emphatically: “challenging! Really challenging! I felt more inferiority [at NLAU] so I had to accept more about me, my background, my personality or... more deeper... exploring” (V11, 1:27:05).

Once they had finished addressing the processes of ‘self-discovery’, ‘self-development’ and ‘self-acceptance’, I asked them if they led to action and they thought that they did; thus, ‘taking action’ was added to the Gr1PECR5, along with the examples written below it. They felt that this could include tangible actions, such as Yuko’s act of establishing the “diversity club”, or it could be cognitive acts, such as making decisions, which then guides action. Wakako said that accepting ourselves gives us the confidence to show ourselves to others, making us more honest and able to speak and act as ourselves. This is consistent with my interpretation of their ‘taking action’ as ‘taking *authentic* action’. Yuko added that once we accept our own individuality, we are more likely to accept others’, too. Yuko also felt that this knowledge and acceptance of the self can lead students to aspire to careers that give them a role in society because being aware of the issues that are important to one’s self can guide one to take more responsibility for the

wellbeing of society. She believed that people have an intrinsic sense of justice that can guide them if they are aware of it.

At the end of this session (the eleventh), we agreed that there was still work to do to bring everything together but being the end of the semester with impending exams the group was reluctant to do more to the PECRs. We had one more session scheduled, and they all agreed that this would have to be the last one of the semester, and the final session for Yamato, Ayuka, Arisa and Akari. I said that I would consider ways to bring their PECRs together and in the next session we would talk about their recommendations for the administration of NLAU. I took my attempt at bringing everything together (appendix 5.5) to session 12 and we discussed it for a while, but it did not add anything that had not already been said so I will not discuss it here. The next section will discuss Group 1's synthesis of their analyses and their recommendations to the administration (Gr1SR).

## 5A.6 Group 1's Synthesis and Recommendations

Group 1's PECRs amount to their synthesis of their research. They did not provide a succinct verbal or written summary of their synthesis, so I will present one here. By participating in the NLAU environment and interacting with the elements within it, students (tend to) have (often challenging) experiences that prompt the processes of self-discovery, self-development, self-acceptance which can lead to taking authentic action.

In the twelfth session, I explained that we were to translate these insights into policy recommendations to the administration of the university. Yuko wanted to know who our audience would be, but I suggested that it might be more productive if we ignored the audience for now, since they may feel constrained with a particular authority in mind. Accordingly, I suggested that they begin by brainstorming aspects of NLAU that they thought should change on the basis of what we learned from our research. No coherent list of recommendations was completed, due to time constraints - we concluded that the final recommendations could wait until the following semester, when Group 2 would carry on the research. Nevertheless, a number of areas for improvement were identified. I will

report these based on their conversations and the results of their brainstorming (appendix 5.6). They can be summarised as: using the conception of learning in NLAU depicted in their PECRs to promote NLAU to prospective students; deal with the risks associated with NLAU's diversity; and redesign the dormitory system to better facilitate social interaction between the students.

Yuko thought that the current brochure, distributed to prospective students, was superficial and dishonest. She felt that the focus only on the curriculum and the success stories belied the way that students really learn at NLAU and that it would be more productive to describe the NLAU experience in terms of their research conclusions. "We come here to buy zassetsu; to feel zassetsu; that's part of NLAU", she said. I asked the group if they thought that this would be attractive to seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds who were deciding which university to go to. Wakako thought that those looking for the easiest path would not come and Ayuka added that only those who really wanted to develop themselves would come. Yuko thought that NLAU's reliance on their 99% graduate employment rate to market themselves attracted students who were focused on future job security and were, therefore, passive in their approach to learning. The others wholeheartedly agreed. Wakako added that incoming students are unaware that it is the qualities they gain by overcoming zassetsu that makes them attractive to employers. Yuko, Wakako and Ayuka, therefore, agreed that an issue that should be addressed is that many students are unaware that they are going through this formative process, and that the brochure would be one way of achieving this.

While acknowledging that dealing with the challenges of participating in a diverse community was one of the primary sources of learning in NLAU, Yuko thought that NLAU had a responsibility to protect students from the dangers posed by the cultural diversity of the student body. She said that some male international students took advantage of some female Japanese students sexually (this is a problem that is acknowledged and, to some extent, dealt with by NLAU's administration). I include this here because this is Yuko's perspective, but I would like to point out that I do not see this as a result of the intercultural environment because there have been a number of high-profile cases of this happening in other universities, with no involvement of foreign students (*Japan Today*, 2017;

Schreiber, 2016). Yamato also thought that relationships between Japanese and exchange students can be problematic; he said: “I think that’s one problem because [some students] go out of the course (*gesturing veering off course*) some students spend too much on drinking and hanging out with international students and they don’t really come to class” (V12, 1:14:20). Akari expressed reservations about the institution getting involved in issues such as this. Ayuka thought that the problem may be due to the fact that, since the classes were in English (a second language to the Japanese students) they had to be simplified, making them too easy for many international students. This mismatch in the demands on exchange and degree-seeking students lies at the source of this problem, she thought.

Akari said that she thought the dormitory system did not help in the learning of the students as well as it could. She pointed out that that their research had shown social interaction to be a key point of learning and important for motivation. However, she felt the design of the Komachi dormitory, in particular, did not effectively facilitate such interaction, especially between degree-seeking and exchange students. She said that the lobby was the only real communal space, but it was used predominantly by students playing video games, which made conversation difficult. Wakako and Yuko protested because, as Resident Assistants (RAs), they have worked hard to remedy this by organising events. Akari insisted that it was the fault of the design of the building and that while events helped, joining them required scheduling and planning, which put many students off. They need space for natural interaction, she argued. Yuko and Wakako agreed. Yuko thought that this problem was exacerbated by the practice of putting EAP students in there with the international students; EAP students, she argued, are too busy establishing relationships within their cohort and coping with the EAP workload to prioritise relationships with the international students. She thought the system should change because of this.

## 5A.7 Conclusion of Group 1’s Research

Through their research, Group 1 came to see learner autonomy in NLAU as a process of discovery, development and acceptance of the self that can then lead to

authentic action. This process can occur when students participate in the NLAU environment. The English medium curriculum, the cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic diversity of the student body, the study abroad programme, along with the small and isolated nature of the community tends to challenge the students psychologically, socially and academically. By dealing with these challenges and learning to participate in NLAU life on their own terms, students can come to recognise, appreciate and cultivate their individuality. This is their conception of learner autonomy in the context of NLAU. I should note here, though, that although the inquiry group did not discuss cases of students failing or dropping out of the university as a result of such challenges, as a member of faculty at the university, that such cases do exist.

Group 1 thought, on the basis of their understanding of learner autonomy in NLAU, that the administration could enhance this process by raising awareness of the processes involved in NLAU students' learning, which would encourage students to embrace the kind of experiences that are instrumental in this; or by redesigning the dormitories to better facilitate the social interaction that lies at the heart of this kind of learning. They also thought that NLAU had a responsibility to reduce the risks involved in participating in such a diverse community. This concludes the work of Group 1. From here, I describe the work done by Group 2, who proceeded through roughly the same steps as Group 1 in the following semester.

## 5A.8 Group 2's Inquiry

After a break, through the month of August, 2017, Group 2 convened. As noted above, Group 2 included only Yuko and Wakako, who participated only partially in the work of Group 1. In the autumn term of 2017, they completed all phases of the project, from constructing and analysing their MNs through the creation of Conceptual Representations (Gr2ICRs, Gr2CCR and Gr2PECR) and the Gr2SLEI to the Gr2SR. The previous chapter presented their MNs along with their own and my analyses; here I document the development of their intersubjective perspective on learner autonomy in NLAU through their conceptual and empirical work, which, as I pointed out earlier, inevitably builds upon the understanding gained by Group 1

(of which they were also a part). The process followed a similar pattern to the previous semester, except that Yuko, due to conflicting commitments, did not finalise her MN until the very end of the process. She did complete a draft at the same time as they both produced their ICR and CCR. However, I would argue that this does not compromise the integrity of the data because deep reflection on her own experiences at NLAU were continuous throughout the inquiry and, in particular, Yuko's part of the word-web that they produced after Wakako presented her MN, could be viewed as a preliminary version of Yuko's MN (see appendix 4.1); just as it was an extension of Wakako's MN rather than an analysis of it. Furthermore, perhaps this serves as a useful reminder that an individual's perspective is at all times potentially under the influence of others, but it is nevertheless our unique experiences that underlie our individuality, with the perspectives of others serving as a foil for reflection that promises to deepen and elaborate our own perspectives. In other words, I argue that, rather than being a source of 'cross-contamination', sharing perspectives has the potential to deepen them.

## 5A.9 Group 2's Individual Conceptual Representations

By session 17, Wakako's MN had been presented and analysed, we had talked extensively about Yuko's history and both of them had produced their Gr2ICRs. The remainder of this section will present and discuss these.

### *5A.9.1 Yuko's Individual Conceptual Representations (Gr2ICR1 and 2)*

Yuko said that she had based her ICRs (Gr2ICR1 and 2, as seen in figure 5.14) on the word-web that they had produced in the previous session. The reader may notice that it tells a very similar story to her MN, analysed in the previous chapter and says nothing about Wakako's MN, so it could perhaps more accurately be described as an analysis of her MN (contrary to what one might assume, she stated that she drew her MN prior to her ICR). Nevertheless, I include it here because it marks a move to a more abstract mode of thinking, and she presented it as her ICR.

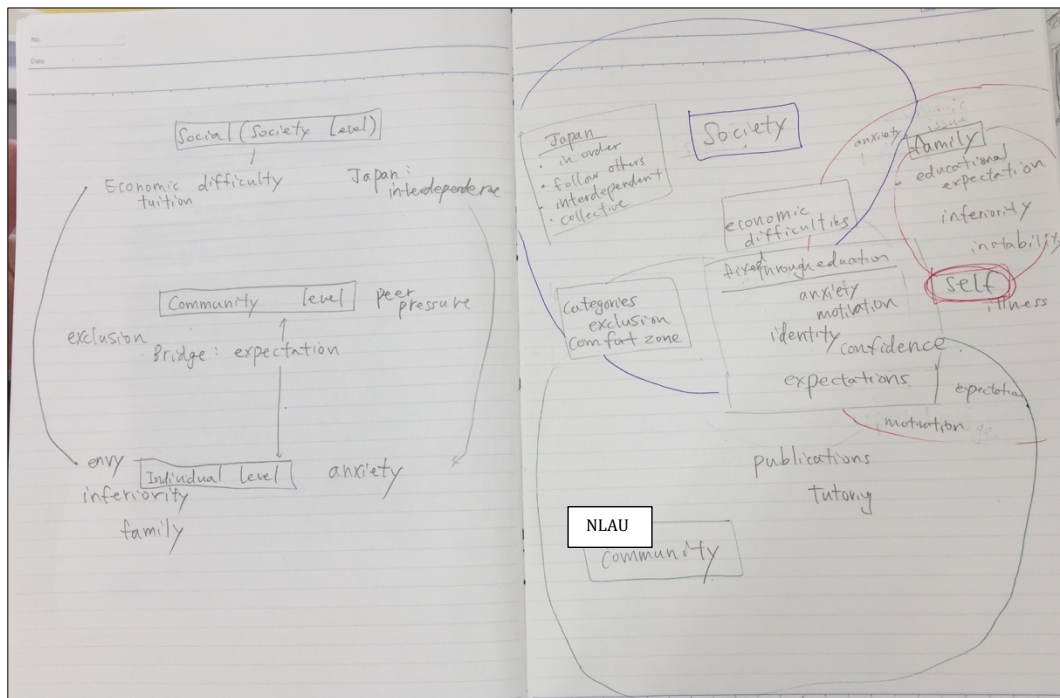


Figure 5.14. Yuko's ICRs (left: Gr2ICR1 and right Gr2ICR2)

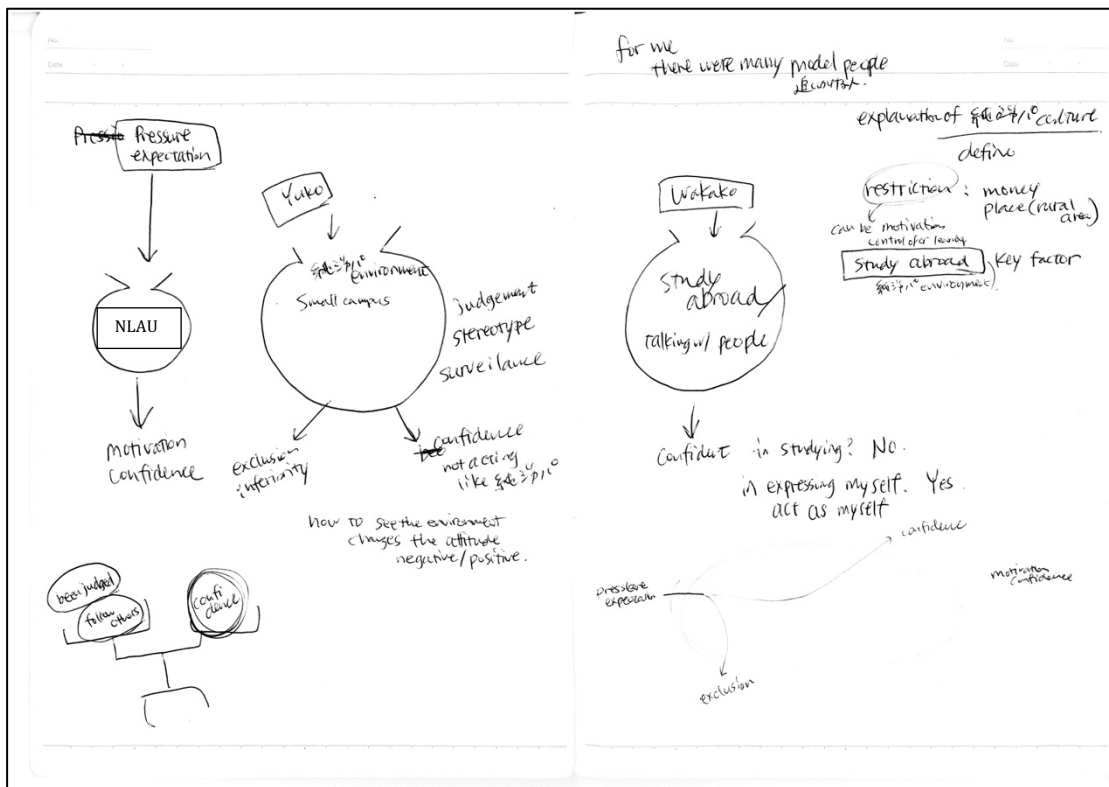
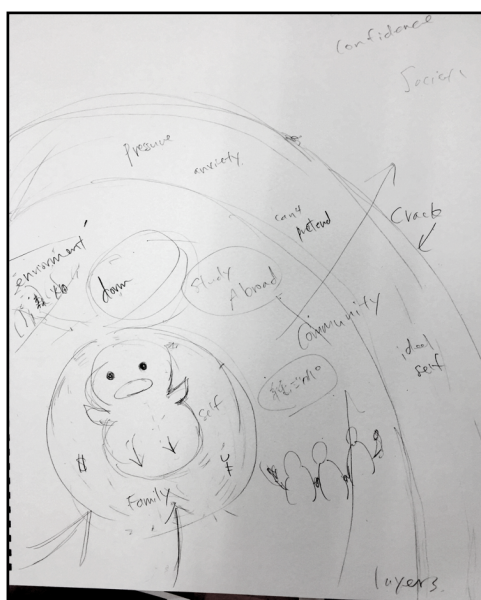
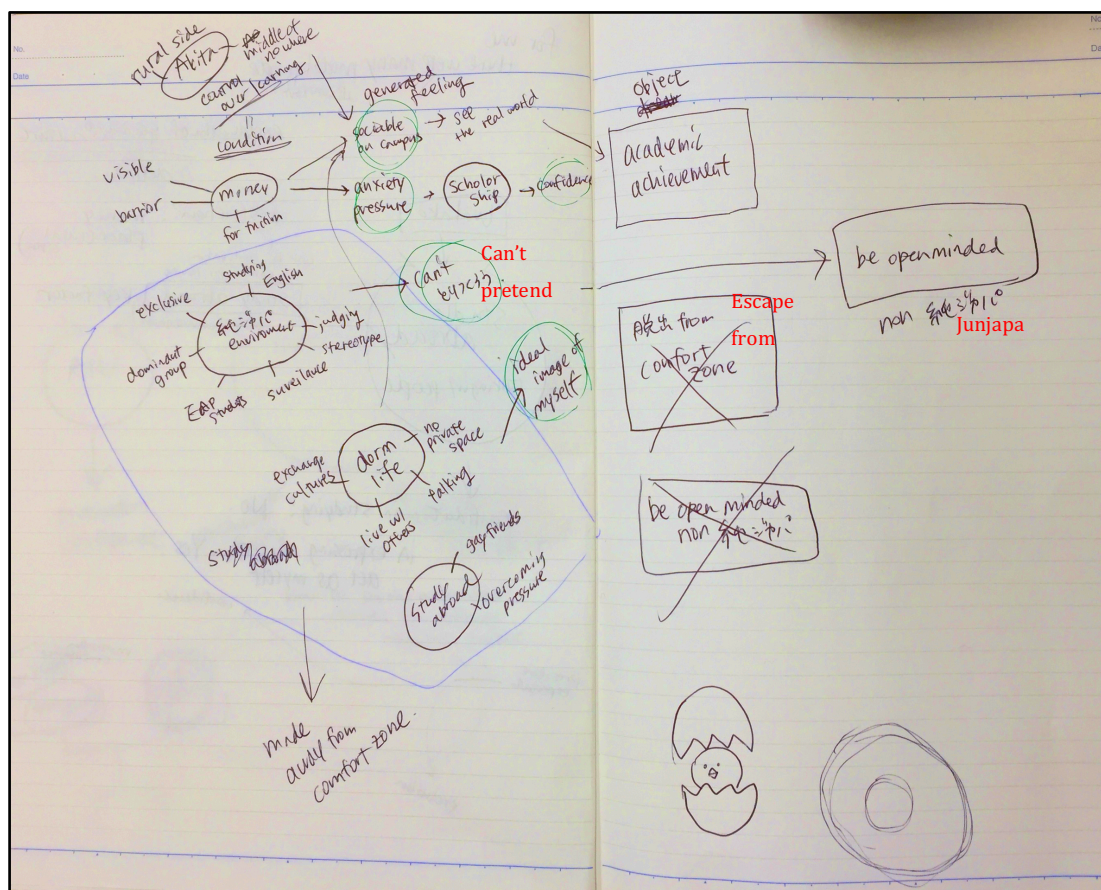


Figure 5.15. Wakako's first ICR (Gr2ICR3)







She explained that she thought that learning was the result of relationships between the individual, the NLAU community and society, so she had begun with the hierarchical model seen on the left page (Gr2ICR1), with society at the top, the NLAU community in the middle and the individual at the bottom. In doing so, she realised that the individual was connected to society not only through the NLAU community, but also directly (she gave financial difficulties as an example), causing her to abandon this shape. The lines reaching between society and the individual at either side are an indication of this and an attempt to rectify it, but she ultimately decided on the Venn diagram on the right (Gr2ICR2).

In explaining Gr2ICR2, she drew our attention to the “self” circle and the “NLAU community” circle and explained that opportunities to publish her work and her tutoring job motivated her, along with the expectations of her that she perceived to be held by her “junjapa who are [no longer] non-junjapa friends” (V17). She then pointed to the box containing “categorisation”, “exclusion” and “comfort zones”, which, in the context of what she discussed in the previous session’s word-web and her MN, I surmise refers to the “groupism” that she perceives among the ‘junjapa’ students, with many of them preferring to remain in groups of people similar to them. Acknowledging that they relate partly to her self, she justifies their position in the diagram by stating that this groupism is a characteristic of Japanese society that affects the NLAU community. In the box at the top left, she includes what she sees as other characteristics of Japanese culture: orderly, a proclivity to follow others, interdependent and collectively orientated. Verbally she added that capitalism, hierarchy and measurements of success would also be characteristics of society that impact upon student life. She has placed “economic difficulties” at the juncture between the self and society, along with “anxiety”, which illustrates the role that her financial circumstances play in her emotional life. In the “self” portion of the diagram are aspects of her self that she feels result from her family – an expectation to succeed in education, a sense of inferiority and instability - and illness. The box entitled “fixed through education” she placed in the centre of the diagram, where all elements converge. This represents her belief that her issues relating to anxiety, motivation, identity, confidence and the expectations of others were resolved as a

result of her educational experience, which was created by the interaction between elements of her self, the NLAU community and society.

This ICR echoes the conceptual work of Group 1 in that it represents the interaction between the individual and their environment, but it is the first to explicitly emphasise the influence of Japanese society on both the NLAU community and the individual directly. Certainly, Ayuka referenced life outside of NLAU in Gr1ICR3, but this did not specify how Japanese society impacts student life. Similarly, specific instances of the way that Japanese society influences students were discussed at numerous points in Group 1's inquiry, but were clearly not considered significant enough to include in their conceptual work. Perhaps this difference could be attributed to Yuko's unique perspective resulting from her considerable experience living outside of Japan and to a lesser extent being a mature student with experience outside of the educational context. Regardless, this is further confirmation of the value that a diversity of perspectives brings.

#### *5A.9.2 Wakako's Individual Conceptual Representations (Gr2ICR3 and 4)*

Once Yuko indicated that she had finished talking about her ICR, Wakako immediately began to explain the first of her two models (Gr2ICR3, as shown in figure 5.15). She said that at first she thought of NLAU as a magic box; in which the pressure and expectations from others, as she saw it, became motivation and confidence – ostensibly negative things became positive for the individual. She said this while pointing to the diagram on the left side of the page, which depicts this as an abstract principle. Then, using the diagram to the right of it, she gave Yuko as an example of how this is manifested: as a result of the small campus and the junjapa environment she became more confident – the environment had changed her attitude. The diagram to the right signifies how the principle applied to her: her study abroad environment and people she met made her more confident. However, as is signified by the diagram, with the forked arrows, below her manifestation of this principle, it is not inevitable that this pressure and expectation leads to

confidence; it can equally lead to exclusion (and, presumably, other destructive outcomes). In concluding her explanation of these diagrams, she acknowledged that they only explained the input and the output, and said nothing of the dynamics responsible for the various outcomes. She addressed these in Gr2ICR4 (seen in figure 5.16).

After pointing out the gaps in Gr2ICR3, she turned to Gr2ICR4 (figure 5.17), in which she attempted to fill them. She told us that she had rearranged (and, apparently, simplified to some extent) the word-web that they had drawn in the previous session (appendix 4.1). She explained that the part at the top (the terms surrounding the bubbles containing “Akita” and “money”) are tangible, relatively static and immutable aspects of NLAU life: the financial circumstances of the individual students and the physical characteristics of the campus. As an example of how such elements can impact students, she explained that the discrepancies in financial circumstances impact the social dynamics on campus: the differences are visible and can act as a barrier between students. These immutable elements of NLAU life are beyond the students’ control and they have a pervading influence over their lives, but the way that they respond to them depends on the choices and actions of the individual. For instance, she explained, the rural, isolated location of the campus along with the small size of the community can be a source of stress for the students, but they can also afford opportunities, depending on how they react to them: they enable the forging of close relationships; or they can make students hungry to experience “the real world”, which may make them proactive in seeking opportunities beyond the campus.

She explained that the elements inside the blue circle had caused people to break out of their comfort zones. Then, once out of the comfort zone, students can be sociable on campus or stop pretending to be someone who they are not and to find the “ideal image of [their self]”, she said (these are indicated by the green circles). These are accompanied by increased confidence, but also inevitably anxiety and pressure (since it is hard being outside of one’s comfort zone). “This process can lead to academic achievement and being more open minded” (V17, 42’30), she said. Wakako thought that the learning process was similar to that of a chick breaking out

of its egg: the egg white is like the environment that both nourishes and constrains, and the student must push through this and eventually peck through the shell. This could be seen as an analogy to Group 1's conclusion that learner autonomy in NLAU is the discovery, development and acceptance of the self, prompted by the NLAU environment, that can then lead to authentic action. The metaphor of the egg was developed through the subsequent phases of the inquiry.

### *5A.9.3 Summary of Group 2's Individual Conceptual Representations*

Elements:

- Economic circumstances (Gr2ICR1, Gr2ICR2, Gr2ICR3)
- Japanese collective culture – interdependence and “groupism” which leads to stereotyping and exclusion (Gr2ICR1, Gr2ICR2)
- Japanese culture of a preference for order (Gr2ICR2)
- Japanese tendency to staying in a comfort zone (Gr2ICR2)
- Peer pressure (Gr2ICR1, Gr2ICR2)
- Family pressure to succeed in education (Gr2ICR2)
- Individual psychology - envy (Gr2ICR1), feelings of inferiority (Gr2ICR1, Gr2ICR2), anxiety (Gr2ICR1, Gr2ICR2), instability (Gr2ICR2)
- Family history (Gr2ICR1)
- Illness (Gr2ICR2)
- Opportunities at NLAU – publishing (Gr2ICR2), tutoring experience (Gr2ICR2)
- Study abroad (Gr2ICR3)
- Small size of the campus and its isolated rural location (Gr2ICR3, Gr2ICR4)
- ‘Junjapa’ culture (Gr2ICR3, Gr2ICR4)

Relationships and processes:

- Life at NLAU involves the interaction between the self, the immediate community and Japanese society at large, which results in an educational experience that causes anxiety, but also increased confidence and motivation,

identity formation and learning to deal with the expectations of others (Gr2ICR2, Gr2ICR3).

- Depending on how one responds to the NLAU environment, the outcomes can be positive or negative (Gr2ICR3).
- The rural, isolated location and the small size of the community puts pressure on students to be sociable on campus and makes them hungry to experience the world beyond NLAU (Gr2ICR4).
- Money is a source of anxiety (Gr2ICR2).
- Differences in financial circumstances are visible and can act as a barrier between students (Gr2ICR4).
- There is a dominant group of 'junjapa', which form cliques: people are judgmental and stereotype others, creating a feeling of surveillance (Gr2ICR3).
- Dorm life allows no private space but enables cultural exchange and experience of living with others (Gr2ICR4).
- Study abroad presents challenges to be overcome and broadens horizons (Gr2ICR4)
- Leaving the comfort zone is the primary learning mechanism (Gr2ICR4)

Manifestations of autonomy:

- Identity construction (Gr2ICR2)
- Broadening perspectives (Gr2ICR4)

## 5A.10 Group 2's Collaborative Conceptual Representation (Gr2CCR)

While Wakako explained the metaphor of the chick breaking out of an egg, it resonated with Yuko to the extent that she immediately began to draw a diagram using this idea in her sketchpad. Together, they developed this and it ultimately became their Collaborative Conceptual Representation (Gr2CCR) (see figure 5.17). Offering further explanation of the metaphor, Wakako pointed to the significance of the transition from darkness to light when a chick hatches from an egg; she saw this

as analogous to the new awareness of one's self and the world that we attain when we emerge from the challenging processes depicted in their Gr2ICRs. I suggested that another point of analogy might be the fact that a chick hatching from an egg is an active process that depends on the agency of the chick, rather than being passively pushed from the body of the mother, as in mammalian birth. It is the students, after all, who must negotiate life at NLAU. Both Yuko and Wakako wholeheartedly agreed. Wakako added that the egg grows because as students progress through their NLAU life, their situations change, presenting them with new challenges to overcome – they crack through one shell only to find another layer to negotiate. She said that the size of the egg and the number of layers depends on the person.

They spent a few moments adding to the diagram. The elements in the inner circle – self, family history and financial circumstances (as indicated by \$ and ¥ symbols) – are to varying degrees immutable and inescapable elements that the student carries with them through all their experiences. “Dormitories”, “study abroad” and “junjapa”, contained in the layer directly outside of that, Wakako pointed out, lies in the social domain, “these are created by other people”, she said. This is indicated by the three conjoined figures and the word “community”. Wakako also thought that the (physical) environment should be inside the centre of the egg because it also has a pervading influence and lies outside of the control of the students, but Yuko drew it as if piercing in from the outside. The outer layer, between the social domain and the shell, contains what are the intangible results of the interaction between the elements in the inner layer and those in the social domain and the environment: “pressure”, “anxiety”, “can’t pretend” (referring to the impossibility of pretence in such a close-knit community) and the “[the discovery of their] ideal self”. Beyond the shell is written “society”, indicating life after NLAU, and “confidence” that they perceive to result from cracking out of the egg. The arrows at the bottom of the diagram indicate the chick/student arriving at NLAU and the arrow running from the centre diagonally to the top right corner indicates that they must push through the layers and break out of the egg, or, analogously, embrace and overcome the challenges presented by the NLAU environment.

As mentioned before, this theme of transformation as a result of overcoming challenges, represented in this CCR is a continuation from Group 1's conclusion that learning in NLAU is a matter of discovery, development and acceptance of the self, that results from engagement in the NLAU context. This is developed through the Gr2SLEI. The next section documents the process and the results of this. The process began at the end of this session 17, with me asking them to think of research questions that would help them, through inquiry, to develop the ideas contained in the Gr2CCR and to ground them in further empirical research. I told them that because they had been quite abstract from the start, it would be valuable to investigate how these processes are realised in the concrete experiences of the students.

### 5A.11 Group 2's Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry (Gr2SLEI)

In the eighteenth session, Wakako and Yuko, with some intervention from me, decided the research questions for the Gr2SLEI and the methods for addressing them. The inquiry had two phases. First, visual representations and mini narratives of students' motivational trajectories, collected from twenty-three students after session 18, which were analysed in session 19. Second, their analysis led to the identification of individuals with whom to conduct follow-up interviews in order to learn more about their experiences. These were conducted after the nineteenth session and shared in the twentieth. I provide details of this process in this section.

By the eighteenth session, Wakako had written the following research questions in her MRJ: Does feeling inferior to others generate students' motivation to learn? How do people break out of their comfort zones? Does comparison to others enhance students' motivation? And Yuko wrote the following, during session 18, while we were revisiting their Gr2CCR: How do people overcome *zasetu*? Are they aware of it? What did they do? How did they experience/overcome it? What/when was their epiphany moment? How does evaluation from others affect their learning? Although they didn't reach a consensus on a unified set of the research questions, I considered their questions to be sufficiently similar to begin discussing methods that they could

use to address them; and I saw no need to intervene because their questions cohered with their CCR.

I began the discussion on methods by presenting them with an overview of some qualitative research methods that I had prepared (see appendix 5.7), including interviews, walking interviews (Lynch and Mannion, 2016), focus groups, participant observation and participatory GIS (Gubrium and Harper, 2016). Yuko and Wakako showed only mild interest in these techniques, commenting that most of them didn't really fit the research questions and Group 1 had used interviews, so they thought it would be interesting to try something else. We also discussed the possibility of using narrative research techniques, involving the co-construction of narratives through conversation. Yuko then suggested that they simply gather students, show their model to them and ask whether or not they agree with it. After a moment's consideration, I expressed concern that this method might unnecessarily couch their informants thinking in terms of their model, leading only to confirmation of their preconceptions. They both agreed and continued to think of alternatives. After some time, I remembered a conversation I had had with Wakako in an earlier session about a personal development event that she had participated in in the community. I reminded her of this and they decided to adapt it to their purposes. The event had been organised to facilitate collaboration between adults across a range of professional disciplines, called "My Project", at the Gojome Share Village. Although not aimed at them, students were also welcome. As a means of prompting reflection on their lives they had been asked to chart their life trajectories as a simple line graph, which they were then asked to talk about in a group. I thought that this might be an effective way of exploring students' experience of *zassetsu* without explicitly revealing that this was the focus, thereby testing Wakako and Yuko's assumption that *zassetsu* was necessary for personal transformation.

Both Wakako and Yuko agreed that this method could effectively serve their purpose, so they created an instrument that asked their informants to chart their motivation levels throughout their time at NLAU (see figure 5.18 for a sample of the instrument). Motivation level would be represented by the vertical axis and time by the horizontal axis. There was some discussion about whether the time should begin



at the start of NLAU or before, since Wakako thought that the pre-NLAU history of students (including her own) often had an impact on their NLAU experiences. I concurred that this may be the case, but suggested that such details could emerge through dialogue after the drawing phase if they felt that such experiences had been relevant. They agreed. Discussion moved on to the issue of how to conduct the interviews: whether one-to-one or as a group. Wakako’s initial instinct was to do it one-on-one, but Yuko thought that it might feel a little “staged” to have them tell their story to only one person. After some deliberation, they decided that they would initially meet as a group and have their informants complete the graph with a written explanation of the high and low points of their trajectory. They reasoned that this would yield a larger quantity of data and then they could follow up with interviews with selected cases, to gain more depth. They also thought it would be interesting to observe any conversations while they completed the paper task and while they discussed what they had drawn.

After this session, they executed their plan with 23 senior students, by meeting them in groups in student meeting rooms. In the nineteenth session, they shared their data by reporting what each had said. Below, in table 5.2, is a summary of their results (see appendix 5.8 for a comprehensive overview of the results).

	Explanation (In = number designation of the interviewee who reported the experience)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job-hunting: non-specific (I18); relief at getting accepted (I1, 2, 9, 19); prompted to focus seriously on the future after NLAU (I14);</li> <li>• Entering NLAU: general excitement (I3); energised by the excitement and challenge of the new environment (I2, 13)</li> <li>• Goals for the future: finding a clear goal (I4, 5); the feeling of working towards a goal for the future (I4, I12)</li> <li>• English: gaining confidence in EAP (I9); noticing improvement after study abroad (I11, 20); motivated to keep up with others (I19)</li> <li>• Peers: satisfactory social life (I4); living with friends (I10); inspired by the abilities of others (I18, 19)</li> </ul>

<b>High Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study abroad: non-specific (I10); making friends (I6, 8, 18); the excitement and challenge of a new place (I2, 13, 18, 19); the sense that it is coming to an end (I8); making the decision to embrace the challenges (I12, 22); gained knowledge and study skills (I20)</li> <li>• GPA: for study abroad in the desired location (I3, 4, 5, 18); to go to graduate school (I4); pleasure in success (I18)</li> <li>• NLAU festival: motivated by the activities (I15, 21)</li> <li>• The sense that student life is coming to an end and wanting to make the most of the remaining time (I11, 16, 18)</li> <li>• Internship: success after an initial failure (I14); prompted a change in career direction (I16)</li> <li>• Classes: BE was motivating (I15); enjoying the familiarity of NLAU classes (I18)</li> <li>• Living arrangements: enjoying living alone and cooking for oneself (I18)</li> </ul>
<b>Low Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships: broken heart (I1, 10, 17, 23); bad relationships with teachers (I7); friends leaving (on study abroad) (I6)</li> <li>• Job-hunting: the stress of it (I2, 3, 9); apathy after securing a position (I13); took time away from study (I19)</li> <li>• GPA: once the required GPA has been achieved, motivation wains (I3, 19); failing courses (I7); loss of motivation to study non-credit bearing courses (e.g. teacher license programme) (I18)</li> <li>• English: the feeling of being unable to communicate in English during EAP (I4, 21); feeling their English is inferior to others (I11)</li> <li>• Study abroad: non-specific (I4, 8); feeling disinclined to go (I2); communication difficulties (I7); social isolation on study abroad (I7, 8, 22); weather (I8); classes being too easy (I5); hesitating to participate in class (I12); homesickness (I22)</li> <li>• Entering NLAU: doubts about whether NLAU is the right place to be (I6); Loss of motivation after getting used to NLAU life (I13, 20)</li> <li>• Illness (I10, 14)</li> <li>• Internship: took time away from study (I19)</li> <li>• Time management: balancing part-time work and study (I11); balancing club activities and study (I12);</li> <li>• Classes: EAP was “nonsense” (I15);</li> <li>• Start Now seminar: lose confidence by comparing to others (I16)</li> <li>• RA program: regrettable relationships with other RAs (I16)</li> <li>• Akita’s environment: weather (I23)</li> </ul>

Table 5.2. Overview of findings from phase 1 of Gr2SLEI

After sharing their results, they discussed what to do with their new data and how they would decide who to interview. With this in mind, I suggested that they look for common themes in their responses and then identify people who seem like they might have valuable insights into these themes. However, instead they decided to categorise the responses in terms of the motivational trajectories signified by their graphs before choosing individuals from each category to interview. They noted that the informants responded to study abroad in very different ways and decided to divide the responses along these lines. The result of this was four categories based on their motivational trajectory through study abroad: those whose motivation decreased; those whose motivation oscillated; those whose motivation was unaffected by study abroad; and those whose motivation increased.

They then noted that their informants also varied in how they reacted to job-hunting, so they put an arrow next to each name, pointing up for those whose motivation had increased, down for those whose motivation had decreased and pointing horizontally to the right for those who indicated that they had not been affected by it; then in one case, there was a wavy line to suggest that her motivation had fluctuated while job-hunting. Of the 23 participants, thirteen reported a decrease in motivation during this period, two an increase, three indicated that they had been unaffected, one fluctuated, two did not mention it, two had question marks beside a downward arrow, indicating ambiguity but that they appeared to have experienced a decrease in motivation. For the sake of maintaining the anonymity of the participants, who did not consent to the publication of their names, I cannot show a photograph of this table. I commented that it seemed that the majority suffered a decrease in motivation during their job-hunting period and asked them why. Yuko responded that it might be because they are forced to look objectively at themselves when applying for jobs, which can cause “identity crises” (Yuko, V19), in addition to the stress caused by all the additional workload of filling out CVs and job applications; and, of course, if they are rejected by their first company of choice, this takes an emotional toll on them.

They sought to identify two students from each category to interview. After they had deliberated for some time, I commented that it was quite difficult to decide whom to

interview based on what they had written on the board (in retrospect, it may have been better to focus on what the students had written, since the graphs were only meant as a prompt initially). I noted, however, that while sorting through the responses, their curiosity in some cases had been evident, so I asked Wakako (Yuko had momentarily left the room) whether she had any intuitions about who would be able to provide valuable insights, considering the prior knowledge that they had of these people and their stories and the new knowledge they had gained. She immediately circled a name on the board, stating that “from [her] perspective, she had got an insight about herself” (Wakako, V19). She then circled the names of four more people who she felt had “developed themselves drastically – transformed” (Wakako, V19, 1:23:19). In this way, the theme of personal transformation re-emerged. She said that she was also very curious about the people who “didn’t change their mind[s]” (Wakako, V19, 1:25:06), and began to underline the names of those students. Yuko returned, Wakako explained her circling and underlining of names. Yuko agreed with her judgment and suggested underlining one more name, bringing the total to seven underlined names and four circled names.

Then, the conversation moved to how to select prospective interviewees from the eleven students, whose names had been either underlined or circled. Yuko wanted to target people “who had changed” (Yuko, V19); I questioned her knowledge of whether people had really changed or not, she acknowledged that she could not know for sure and suggested sending either an email or an e-survey asking the respondents whether they had changed or not. Wakako preferred to ask them in person. Although I did not voice it, I had reservations about this method, doubting that the answer to such questions would necessarily be conscious and that such awareness may only come about through the interview. Eventually, it was decided that they would target those deemed to be the most expressive. They chose two people from each of the original four categories (based on their study abroad trajectories), one underlined and one circled, to interview. They indicated these individuals with a star beside their names. They planned to interview these eight students for the second phase of the Gr2SLEI, but ultimately only interviewed six, due to the reluctance of two of the proposed interviewees to participate (see appendix 5.8).

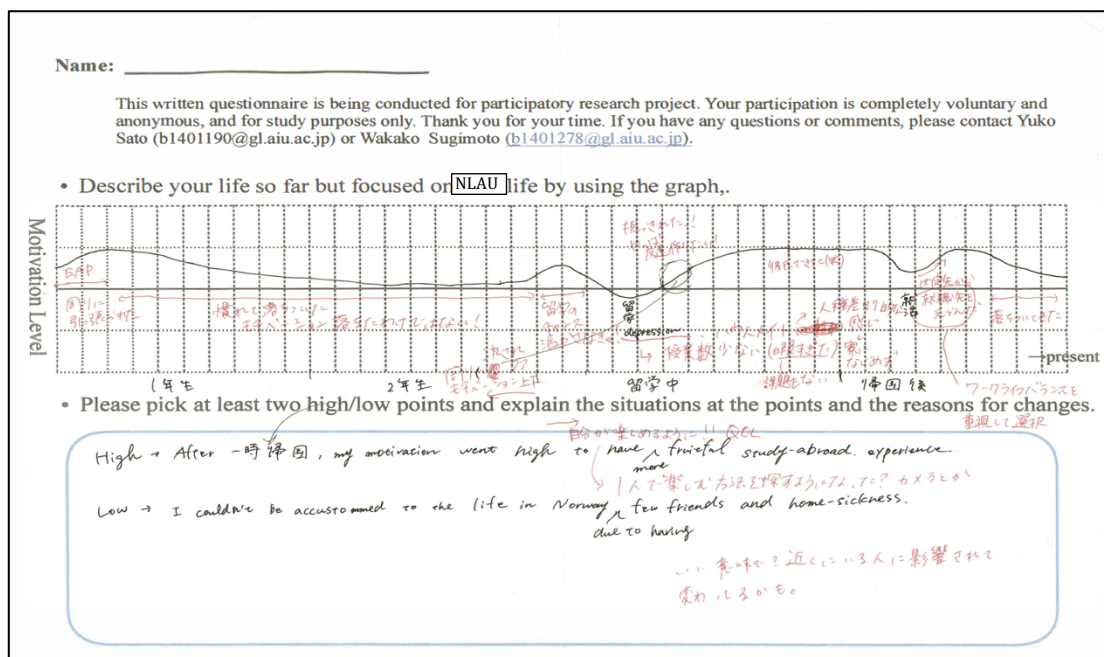


Figure 5.18. Example of Gr2SLEI data collection instrument

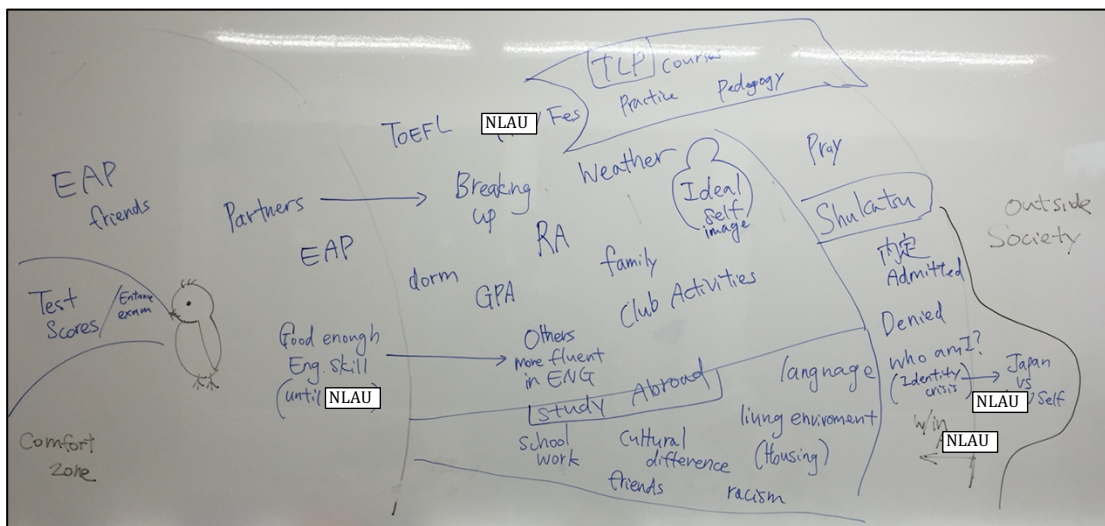


Figure 5.19. Gr2PECR

With the proposed interviewees identified they moved on to the specifics of the interview method. One point they considered was about how to structure the interview, and whether to ask them specifically about study abroad, job-hunting and EAP. I suggested that they had already framed the interview with the instrument that they had created for the initial phase and that it might be more valuable to allow the graphs and comments of the informants to guide the interviews, thereby reducing the risk of allowing the preconceptions of the interviewer to shape the exchange. They agreed. Another point was about the format of the interview: whether to conduct them face-to-face or through a written format, such as email or text messages. They decided that face-to-face was likely to yield richer results. They also discussed whether the interview should be done one-on-one or as a group. I asked them if they thought they would be open in front of each other. They thought that the students who they knew through the Teacher License Programme (TLP) would, so they decided to interview them together and interview the non-TLP students separately on a casual basis.

After completing their plan in the nineteenth session, they had carried out their interviews and were ready to share their results by the twentieth session. They had written notes on the instrument of the initial phase, which they used to relate what they had learned about the interviewees' experiences. I used their notes and transcripts of their conversations (V19) during the session to construct the following summary of the interviews for Gr2SLEI Phase 2.

No.	Main points
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was motivated by people around her during EAP, then she got used to NLAU life, and her motivation remained high.</li> <li>• Her motivation decreased due to the break-up of a romantic relationship</li> <li>• She was very motivated to make the most of her study abroad, but once it began she got depressed. Her motivation for academic work on study abroad was low because it did not count towards her graduating GPA, so she did not work hard. She had always been very motivated by GPA because she aimed to study abroad in Taiwan, even before entering NLAU, and universities there are competitive, meaning a high GPA is required. She got over this and decided she needed to make friends, but she felt that her roommate was racist and could not get used to dorm life. However, she got a boyfriend and her motivation increased.</li> <li>• She returned to NLAU and began job-hunting. She was accepted by a number of companies and chose one on the basis of the work-life balance they promised. She was relieved to have got a job for after she graduated and became settled and happy.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was disappointed with EAP because he had taken a similar course in high school, but once he started BE and was able to learn more than just English, he became more motivated by the academic side of NLAU.</li> <li>• He was learning Spanish before his study abroad.</li> <li>• His lowest point in his time at NLAU was when his girlfriend broke up with him. Although this had been a bad experience for him, it had prompted him to realise that he needed to expand his social life. He had had friends before the break-up but he thought he didn't really need them, but then after the break-up, he realised that he did not have the community that he needed.</li> <li>• He got another girlfriend immediately after breaking up with the previous one, so he was not particularly heart-broken.</li> <li>• After this he went on his study abroad in Taiwan. His motivation wavered because he had trouble communicating, having not learned to speak Chinese. This meant that he had trouble making friends and, because he had to go out for every meal and struggled to face people, he even struggled to feed himself. But during the summer of his study abroad he took part in a PBL programme in Malaysia,</li> </ul>

	<p>which he enjoyed. Nevertheless, he did not enjoy his study abroad and he never wants to return to Taiwan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On his return from study abroad, he embraced the NLAU community more and became happier.</li> <li>• He is ultimately glad he came to NLAU because it was valuable to experience the hardship.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He didn't like EAP because he felt that his English was inferior to others'; furthermore, he didn't get on very well with his classmates.</li> <li>• He liked BE and his involvement in the NLAU committee at that time motivated him. Being involved in the school festival was his favourite time at NLAU.</li> <li>• He went to Taiwan for study abroad and entered a running competition, but he didn't say much about this, according to the notes.</li> <li>• He had a hard time during job-hunting because he was unable to get the jobs that he wanted.</li> <li>• He felt that he had become well-rounded and more compassionate through his experiences at NLAU; he had previously thought that it was cool always to fight and compete with other people, but through his challenges at NLAU he had realised that it is better not to.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She didn't like studying much when she arrived at NLAU, but she settled into EAP and enjoyed working hard.</li> <li>• She pushed herself too hard and burned out during BE, losing credits for the first time. Clubs were also busy at this time.</li> <li>• During her study abroad she had high self-esteem because she felt that she could do it.</li> <li>• She did not do job-hunting immediately after she came back from study abroad and she felt like she was ordinary compared to others who were getting ready to embark on a new life.</li> <li>• She did her TLP internship and then got a job.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After applying to NLAU, he had second thoughts, but he passed the entrance exam so he felt that he had to go.</li> <li>• He thought that EAP was fun and he made good friends during this period, but he had an inferiority complex about his English.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He studied hard to learn Spanish after EAP. He liked it because pronunciation was easy</li> <li>• He went to New Mexico for his study abroad – the weather was good and he enjoyed it. He made friends from Korea and Germany</li> <li>• After coming back he enjoyed catching up with old friends and noticed that he had become good at managing his time. During this time, he enjoyed expanding his community: going to parties, finding friends who he got on well with.</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She had always wanted to be an English teacher.</li> <li>• Before she came to NLAU her confidence rested on her English ability, but she attended the Start Now Seminar, which is a seminar offered to students who want to get a head start before they start at NLAU, and she lost this confidence. This made her start to wonder about her identity. This was exacerbated when he struggled to attain the required TOEFL score after entering NLAU.</li> <li>• She became an RA, but she did not get on very well with the other RAs. She later regretted her attitude to the other RAs.</li> <li>• She enjoyed her time in the community on her study abroad</li> <li>• After returning from her study abroad, she did her TLP internship, which she did not enjoy. This was a turning point because she decided that she no longer wanted to be a teacher. After letting go of her long held ambition, she became more relaxed and open-minded about her options for the future.</li> <li>• Then she started job-hunting and felt a gap in values between herself and others at NLAU.</li> </ul>

Table 5.3. Overview of findings from phase 2 of Gr2SLEI

On the basis of their newly gained insights they began redrawing their conceptual representation. This is the focus of the next section. Before moving on, however, I draw a brief comparison of the inquiry methods used by Groups 1 and 2. The systematic, semi-structured interviews of Group 1, while yielding rich data on their research questions, lacked the flexibility of the methods of Group 2. I would argue that the Group 2's methods allowed the experiences and concerns of the interviewees to drive the course of the interview, thereby yielding to more authentic insights.

## 5A.12 Group 2's Post-Ethnography Collaborative Re-conceptualisation

Yuko and Wakako were already aware of the next step, since we had already discussed it and they had participated in the construction of the Gr1PECR. Perhaps this was the reason that they appeared to be in such haste to begin (neglecting to go over all the interview data). Yuko, in particular, clearly had this task in mind from the beginning of the session and was ready to reconceptualise learner autonomy in NLAU in light of what she had learned from Gr2SLEI. She suggested that they redraw the egg diagram (Gr2CCR) and discuss the elements that influence the students and into which layer in the egg they should go. The outcome of this process was Gr2PECR, as seen in figure 5.19. Yuko began by drawing the overall structure in black marker. The chick represents the student and the layer around it, the yoke, represents what they described as the comfort zone. Beyond this is the egg white, which represents the NLAU environment and all the potential challenges that it presents. The chick must push through this and peck through the outer shell to the “outside society”, all the while being challenged yet nourished by the experiences gained.

Once the structure was complete, they started to discuss which elements belong in the yoke/comfort zone. First, they agreed that the “partners” of students are a part of their comfort zone and, since several informants had reported that breakups prompted them to leave the comfort zone, this was connected to “Breaking up”, in the egg white, by an arrow. They also thought that in the case of informants 2 and 8, their competence in English had contributed to a sense of comfort in their pre-NLAU life that they subsequently lost after entering NLAU. Thus, the element, “Good enough English skill (until NLAU)”, was included in the comfort zone and connected to “Others more fluent in [English]”, in the egg white, by an arrow, signifying their exit from the comfort zone. “EAP” and “EAP friends” were also included as elements in the comfort zone. They agreed that, although adapting to the new environment was a challenge at first, they quickly became comfortable because they were surrounded by other Japanese students, who were, in most cases, from similar

educational backgrounds and, therefore, suffering the same difficulties adapting to the unfamiliar academic demands of the NLAU curriculum. I would also add, based on my prior knowledge as well as all of the data up until this point and conversations between the participants, that the friends made in this period often become the bedrock of students' social life throughout NLAU. "Test scores/entrance exam" was also included in the comfort zone as a manifestation of the success students had enjoyed in the typical Japanese education system: they had attained the high scores necessary to enter NLAU, which gave them confidence in their academic abilities, but this was shaken by being surrounded by other high achieving students and the unfamiliar academic demands of the NLAU curriculum.

After completing the yoke/comfort zone, they added elements to the egg white. Yuko thought that "family" should be included here because, although the informants did not mention it, family issues had played a significant role in her own challenges and, she argued, it plays a role in everyone's mental life, but the informants may not have been comfortable sharing such private information (I would argue that the position of family, whether in the yoke or the white, would likely depend on the family background of the individual). Then they moved on to study abroad; they thought that, considering the impact that it has on all students' trajectory, it warranted a dedicated portion of the egg white that included all of the associated elements. They included, without much discussion, "language", "living environment (housing)", "cultural differences" and "school work", which they said tended to be more demanding on study abroad. Later they also included "friends" and "racism", with Yuko adding that they do not experience this in Japan, but she certainly did on her study abroad (this had also played a major role in Ayuka's MN and Interviewee 1 in the Group 2 SLEI).

Yuko suggested that she draw a dedicated "Shukatsu" (job-hunting) section, signified as a 'final frontier' of NLAU life by its position at the outer limits of the egg white, which students must 'peck' through to reach society beyond (the section extends from the TLP section at the top to the bottom of the diagram). In it they included: "Pray" indicating the hopes students have for getting their desired jobs; "内定" (naitei - job offer) and "Admitted", signifying their success in securing a job.

They also added the following elements to the outer limits of the egg white: “Denied”, signifying their failure to get their desired job; “who am I? (Identity crisis)” connected to “Japan vs. NLAU Self” by an arrow, which seem to indicate a relationship. They did not elaborate on this relationship at this point, but on the basis of earlier conversations, I interpret this to signify the challenge to their identity they experience, particularly, when a job application is rejected. Such rejection causes them to reflect unfavourably on themselves and wonder if the person they have become at NLAU is compatible with Japanese society. They also thought that the TLP program belonged in a section of its own, similarly situated at the outer limits of the shell, since it also connects students to society beyond.

The remaining elements in the egg white are part of the general NLAU environment. Yuko noted that the interviewees had not said anything about dormitories, but, as RAs, her and Wakako continually heard about issues relating to students’ dorm life, so she suggested writing “dorm” and “RA” in the egg white. Wakako agreed. They thought that it should be pretty close to the comfort zone, but not in it, and that many people were ambivalent about dorm life. Many people complained about living with other people when it was compulsory in the first year (like Akari, in the previous semester), but Wakako thought that now they were getting to the end of their time at NLAU, people were missing living with others. Yuko added that living with others changes one’s perspective. Yuko wrote “Ideal Self” inside a little figure in the middle of the egg white. Wakako asked her about it, and she explained that two of the informants had tried to become their ideal self but had realised that it was not possible at NLAU and, subsequently, became more open-minded to other ideas and people. Wakako thought that discovering their ideal self was one positive outcome of students’ time at NLAU. Moving on, Wakako suggested adding the university festival, since it was mentioned by several of the informants. Yuko wrote “NLAU fes” in the middle of the egg white, adding that they become a little crazy at this time, and that many students have “nervous breakdowns”, due to the demands put on them to prepare for it and only afterwards say how great it has been. Wakako acknowledged this before suggesting the addition of “Club Activities”, which Yuko also added to the egg white. Then they quickly added “GPA” and “TOEFL”. They also agreed that “weather” had been a factor for many students, both at NLAU and on their study

abroad and wrote it in the egg white. And this concludes elements that they felt, on the basis of their own experiences and their research, that impact upon the journeys of NLAU students and are responsible for their personal transformation.

As a whole then, the Gr2PECR represents the process of personal transformation that involves the self-discovery, self-development and self-acceptance identified in the previous semester, and can come about when students participate in the NLAU context. The elements that are salient in the NLAU context in this process are:

- Romantic relationships
- Relative English ability
- The NLAU curriculum
- Family
- Study abroad
- The job-hunting process
- The TLP
- Dormitories and the RA system
- Notions of the ideal self
- The school festival
- Club Activities

As was made clear by Group 1 and in Wakako's ICR1, the way that students respond to these elements depends on the individual, along with all facets of their self. By going through multiple cycles of personal transformation, a process of growth can occur, potentially readying students for life in society beyond NLAU.

### 5A.13 Group 2's Synthesis and Recommendations (Gr2SR)

After completing the Gr2PECR in the twentieth session and during the first part of the twenty-first (the final) session, Wakako and Yuko talked about what their diagram meant, which constituted their synthesis and aligned closely with that of Group 1. This then led to a discussion of how their findings could be applied to enhance the learning processes that they identified in NLAU – their recommendations. I elaborate their SR in the remainder of this section.

As stated above, Group 2's synthesis built upon that of Group 1. They concurred that learning in NLAU is a process of discovery, development and acceptance of the self, which arises when students participate in the NLAU context. They also agreed that the English medium curriculum, the cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic diversity of the student body, the study abroad programme, along with the small and isolated nature of the community challenge the students psychologically, socially and academically. And that by dealing with these challenges and learning to participate in NLAU life on their own terms, students potentially come to recognise, appreciate and cultivate their individuality. As represented by the Gr2PECR, they conceived this process as one of active personal transformation.

Through reflection on their own experiences, Group 1's research and their own EI, Group 2 corroborated that, specifically, the major challenges for students were: feeling inferior with regards to their English ability; adapting to and meeting the requirements of the NLAU curriculum; study abroad; financial difficulties; the small, isolated campus and the close proximity in which they were forced to live; job-hunting; the diversity of the student body. In addition to these they added romantic relationships, family and extracurricular activities, such as clubs and the school festival. They also emphasised the exclusion that some students experience on the basis of linguistic ability, relative financial circumstances or failure (or refusal) to conform to perceived norms. Finally, Group 2 made more salient the influence of society, both, directly on the students as well as indirectly through the NLAU community.

This much was represented in the Gr2PECR and was covered in their conversations after completing it in the twentieth session. My question to them at this point was where the control lay. Yuko answered immediately that awareness of this process gives them control over it. Wakako agreed. This consciousness, they believed, arose through honest reflection on their experiences. I wondered aloud whether they thought NLAU students typically reflect in this way and achieve such consciousness. They thought that they did, but they were also quick to point out that their informants had appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in this

way by participating in the Gr2SLEI. The following dialogue ensued (V20, from 45:45):

- Yuko: They said while we were talking that it is so nice to have this chance to talk about this because then [they] can see... [they] can recognise what [they] have been through from... kind of objectively.
- Wakako: People should do this every year, or like reflect [on] themselves and then they can see what they should do or they wanna do.
- Yuko: Maybe we should start to do this before shukatsu because that's when they go all down and they feel like they don't worth anything, but we can say "look at this, you've been this much! You know? You've been through a lot! And that's a... you know?... You should be proud about this".
- Wakako: Yeah, it's their treasure.
- Yuko: I think people do realise it. But I think if it is someone like Takahiro (*pseudonym*), I don't think he will ever learn. Because he doesn't wanna admit it.
- Wakako: That's his like perspective... mind-set... but if many people do that, he gonna do that, I feel. If it's cool, he's gonna LEARN (*laugh*)... Right?
- Yuko: But then he'll use this chance to say like, "oh you had all these challenges, I had nothing" ... just like yeah, OK [...].
- Wakako: Yeah, (*laugh*) learn from yourself!
- Yuko: Exactly, we're all learning from ourselves, right? But if you can't learn from yourself, you're gonna learn nothing!

The sentiment that awareness of the transformative process, through reflection was fundamental to taking control over one's learning echoed through subsequent conversations in the following session. Wakako thought that without reflection, students were likely to forget their experiences and, thus, fail to learn from them. Yuko asserted that without honest reflection the consciousness necessary to exercise control over the learning process could not develop. For this reason,

facilitating the development of such awareness in NLAU students by creating a more reflective culture became the primary focus for their recommendations to the university, which was their main task in the final session.

Their recommendations aimed to achieve three objectives. Firstly, to communicate their synthesis that learning, of the profound kind that they had explored, came about through transformative experiences, which were often a form of *zasetsu* that caused one to doubt and question one's self and, perhaps, trigger an identity crisis. But, also, that they can take control and gain more if they are cognisant that they are undergoing such a process. They hoped that if NLAU students understood this, they would be more likely to embrace challenges that took them out of their comfort zone, which would lead them to transformative experiences. This leads to the second objective: to promote reflection - reflection on the purpose of each component of the NLAU curriculum and reflection on who they want to be, what they want to learn and what kinds of experience would help them learn it. Their final objective was based on the observation that such reflection was more easily achieved through dialogue with others. Thus, they wanted to promote interaction, reflecting on the issues mentioned above. I will elaborate on these three objectives below.

Yuko and Wakako believed that all NLAU students would benefit from the knowledge generated through their inquiry; they thought that the experience of *zasetsu* would be less traumatic and an understanding of the key role that such experiences play in the learning process could encourage students to embrace challenges rather than shy away from them. They thought that they should be made aware of this at the beginning of their time at NLAU, making the freshman their target audience.

A number of ways to communicate their synthesis were discussed. Yuko suggested an amalgamated story that combined the experiences of many students, but was presented as a single story, or a "scary book, that showed them what would happen if they stayed in their comfort zones" (V21). Ultimately, however, we agreed that senior students sharing their personal experiences with freshmen would be an appropriate prelude to an explanation of the enquiry group's conclusions.



However, there were concerns that asking senior students to share such deeply personal information directly with a large audience of freshmen would be unreasonable. Accordingly, they thought that an effective alternative would be to have willing senior students create multimodal narratives (of the kind that they constructed for inquiry), focusing on the following aspects of NLAU: dorm life; EAP; TOEFL score; applications for study abroad (and competing with friends to get the place they want); study abroad (where they might be subjected to racism for the first time); seeing people doing things they can't afford; returning from study abroad to see that some people had already secured good jobs. In this way, the narratives could be used multiple times and would allow their creators to maintain their anonymity (if desired). They saw this as an effective way to lay the ground for an explanation of the learning processes that they had identified and for reflection of the kind that they saw as necessary for learning.

A number of ideas for facilitating reflection were discussed. Yuko thought that, since "Be a Global Leader" is one of NLAU's slogans, it might be possible to orientate their theory of learning and learner autonomy to developing as a global leader. Freshmen students could discuss the kind of leader they would like to become and the purpose of each element of the NLAU, how it might contribute to their development as a global leader and then how they can apply what they have learned and "re-enter society". Another idea that they proposed, considering how beneficial Yuko and Wakako had found participation in this inquiry, was to run a course following the same principles. Needless to say, I found this very encouraging. In addition, Wakako wondered if setting an online activity might be an effective way to facilitate such reflection, but later recognised the importance of interaction with others in recognising things about oneself. This became an important theme in their subsequent reflections.

In recognising the importance of interaction, Wakako related the following anecdote:

“This is a little off topic, but when I was a sophomore, I was really.... maybe around this time [of year], I really wanted to go back to my hometown and see my family. And like I said it to my senpai, “I really want to [go] back to home”. He said, “oh, maybe that explains how much you put effort on the exams or like the homework”. And I didn’t realise how much I was overwhelmed, but the words make me realise like how I was busy and it was almost end of the semester. So sometimes those kind of words can make me feel better and which I couldn’t realise by myself.” (V21, 56:21)

This highlighted the role of others’ perspectives in revealing aspects of one’s self that could otherwise be hidden from your conscious view. It was therefore agreed that the reflective activities following the multimodal narratives of senior students and an explanation of the synthesis of their inquiry should be interactive. We finally decided that an instrument such as the one they had used for the initial phase of their SLEI (see figure 5.18) could be a way of prompting a reflective discussion about the transformative experiences they had had. Yuko and Wakako also emphasised the importance of looking ahead at who they want to become, what they need to learn and how to get the experiences that would help them learn it. In this way, students could take control of not only their learning but also their identity (or their self).

Once this was settled, a number of logistical issues were discussed, the first of which was whether these activities should be voluntary or mandatory. I noted that students might not fully engage with the tasks if they were mandatory, suggesting that making it voluntary might be more valuable. Yuko countered that if it is a choice, nobody would do it, but Wakako thought that they might if the purpose was clear, i.e., to help in their personal development, pointing out that their informants had felt that talking about such things were very valuable. Yuko agreed that they had appreciated the opportunity to reflect like that, and that connecting it to job-hunting might be a way of incentivising them to participate. However, this suggestion ignored freshman and junior students.

The conversation thus moved on to when would be the best times to conduct the activities. They thought that students would benefit from such activities at multiple points in the NLAU curricular sequence: the CCS100 orientation course in the first semester; the career design course that students do before study abroad; the study abroad seminar that prepares students for their study abroad; and during job-hunting. I suggested that it might be possible to integrate their ideas with the e-portfolio system that was being introduced at the time. They agreed that this was a promising solution. The final point that they discussed was whether they should do in it English or another language; they agreed that, since the purpose was reflection, students should be allowed to use their preferred language.

Although the specifics were not finalised in this session, Yuko and Wakako agreed on their synthesis of all that they had learned through both phases of the inquiry, and they also provided a framework for how to apply what they had learned in their recommendations to the administration. Their recommendations were, in essence:

- To raise awareness among freshmen students of the transformative processes that NLAU students undergo, and the key role that zassetsu plays in this.
- To facilitate among students continuing reflection, at key stages in the curriculum, on: who they want to become; the purpose of the various aspects of the NLAU curriculum; how their experiences are affecting them; and what kinds of experience they should seek out. Such reflection should be the basis of discussion with others.

The twenty-first session had been on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, which was also the last day of the Autumn term, Yuko and Wakako's last term before graduation the following March. It was also the final session of our inquiry. Wakako had brought all of the materials that I required, including a paragraph that reflected on her experience of the research process (which I discuss in the next chapter) and her research journal. Yuko gave me her reflective paragraph and gave me the other materials later. Both of them would return to their hometowns until graduation. I proposed that we present our SR to the president and vice president of the university. They agreed, so we arranged to present our research while they were

back in Akita for the graduation ceremony in March. In the interim we communicated by email about the content of our presentation. The details of this will be the subject of the next section.

## 5A.14 Dissemination

Based on our final session and an overview of the conceptual components of Group 1 and Group 2 (i.e. Gr1CCR, Gr1 PECR, Gr1 SR, Gr2CCR, Gr2PECR and Gr2SR) I drew up a policy brief that we presented to the president and vice-president of the university, outlining what the inquiry group had done, what they had found and their recommendations to the administration. I shared this with all members of the inquiry group, inviting feedback. I got no response, so I followed up on LINE (the leading Japanese SNS); they said that they had read it and disagreed with none of it. We arranged to present it to the president and vice president in the office on March 23, 2018, at 11:00am. I invited Group 1 members to join us, but they were either unavailable or they declined. I attempted to arrange a Skype meeting with Yuko and Wakako before our appointment, but this turned out to be impossible, so we arranged to meet at 9:30 on the day of the presentation in my office to discuss the brief and how to present it. After going over the brief in detail, we decided that no changes needed to be made. It elaborated on the following:

The inquiry group found that:

1. Learning emerges from the dynamics between the individual and elements in the NLAU environment.
2. Learning in NLAU is ultimately a matter of *personal transformation*.
3. Control over learning requires knowledge of the self, awareness of the forces that shape it and the confidence to act.

The group's evidence-based policy recommendations are:

1. Since it could be argued that personal transformation is fundamental to a liberal arts education, we feel it would be of benefit to make this strand of the NLAU curriculum more explicit.

2. Since we found that reflection and sharing our experiences was so important in taking ownership over the learning process, we recommend building guided reflective discussion activities (similar to those we used in our research) into the NLAU system at specified intervals.
3. The insights that we gained into our selves and our lives at NLAU, through participating in this research project, led us to believe that such an opportunity should also be given to others. Therefore, we believe that a course that facilitates participative research into aspects of the lives of students should be offered as part of the NLAU curriculum.

The full policy-brief presented to the president and vice president can be found in Appendix 5.9.



Figure 5.20. A photograph taken at the end of our meeting, by the president's assistant, at the request of Yuko, who later shared the photograph with me. From the left: Yuko, the president of the university, Wakako, the vice president, and the author.

In our meeting with the president and vice president of the university (a photograph of this meeting can be seen in figure 5.20), I presented the contents of the brief and

Wakako and Yuko talked about the outcomes from their own perspectives. The presentation was well received. The vice president said that it offered potential solutions to the problem of how to help students to integrate the cross-disciplinary learning that they experience at NLAU, helping them to articulate what they have learned - one of the challenges that he saw for liberal arts education. The president was impressed with the insights and wondered if I planned to follow it up with a quantitative study. I replied that I had no such plans. I will discuss the ways in which the recommendations were implemented in the conclusion chapter.

## 5A.15 Summary and Conclusions of the Student-Led Inquiry

In summary, this chapter documents the development of the inquiry group's intersubjective perspective on learner autonomy in the context of NLAU. This signified a shift from the subjective view of their own experiences that were the focus of their MNs to a view that was increasingly generalised and abstract as they sought to incorporate the perspectives of other students into their understanding of the research focus. First, they considered the experiences of each other, as expressed in their MNs, to conceptualise learner autonomy in NLAU as experienced by the group, which led to the ICRs. The insights of the ICRs were then combined to produce their CCRs; these represented the intersubjective perspective of the group, based on their combined experiences. Then, they drew on the experiences of other students through their SLEI to deepen and broaden their view, which led to the PECRs, which represented visually all that they had learned about learner autonomy in NLAU. Finally, on the basis of what they had learned, the inquiry group made recommendations to the university administration, which were ultimately presented to the president and vice-president of the university. This process involved two cycles, first in the spring semester of 2017 and then with a second iteration in the following semester. I believe this part of the inquiry compounded quality of the research in terms of its fulfilment of the methodological criteria of rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, meaningful coherence and ethicality (described in subsection 3.2.5). Although I believe the inquiry was reinforced in terms of all five

criteria, this component of the inquiry was particularly helpful in increasing its multivocality, which enhances its credibility.

To gather up the threads of this chapter, we can conclude the following about learner autonomy in NLAU:

- While at NLAU, students potentially undergo a process of personal transformation, involving the discovery, development and acceptance of their self, often leading to the recognition, appreciation and cultivation of their individuality.
- This process can occur when the self interacts with elements within NLAU and elements of society beyond, creating transformative experiences that cause a reorganisation of the self.
- Elements that were shown to be active in the transformative experiences of NLAU students were divided into three categories: the 'self', 'NLAU' and 'society'. The self included the elements of: personality; capacities and abilities; histories; positive and negative self-perceptions; values and motivations. Elements of NLAU included: the English medium curriculum, the cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic diversity of the student body, the foreign exchange programme and the small and isolated nature of the community along with the shared dormitory system. Elements in Japanese society that were mentioned were: the collective orientation of Japanese culture; Japan's education system; definitions of success; and Japan's capitalist economy.
- Transformative experiences can begin when students encounter a challenge arising from interaction between elements, which causes them to question and doubt themselves. Such challenges include: feeling inferior with regards to their English ability; adapting to and meeting the requirements of the NLAU curriculum; study abroad; financial difficulties; the small isolated campus and the close proximity in which they were forced to live; job-hunting; the diversity of the student body; romantic relationships; family; pressure from extracurricular activities, such as clubs and the school festival; exclusion that some students experience on the basis of linguistic ability,

relative financial circumstances or failure (or refusal) to conform to the perceived norms NLAU's majority group.

- Through dealing with these challenges students potentially become more aware of themselves – inquiring into their values, their abilities, the limitations of their perspectives. This awareness constitutes a transformation of the self in itself, and it can lead to changes in values, broadening of perspectives and motivation to increase their abilities, thereby being an impetus for further transformation.
- Being aware of this process enables students to take control over it: they can take control over the development of their self. This is learner autonomy in NLAU.

These findings cohere with the conclusions drawn on the individual trajectories, in the last chapter, but also extend them. In the following section, I examine how learner autonomy was manifested in the inquiry process.

## 5B.1 Introduction to the account of manifestations of learner autonomy in the inquiry process

In this section, I interpret the available data from the perspective of how the learner autonomy of the IGMs manifested in the process of conducting the inquiry. Since the inquiry took place within the NLAU context and the IGMs were NLAU students, this process adds a further perspective in addressing the question of how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of NLAU. I must acknowledge, however, that due to the autonomy-oriented design of the methods, the inquiry was a deliberate intervention into the learner autonomy of the IGMs (which I justify from an ethical perspective in subsection 3.2.3), highlighting my role as a participant in the inquiry and in the NLAU context. The data viewed from this perspective nevertheless has the advantage of offering insights into processes involved in learner autonomy as they happened, rather than relying solely on retrospective interpretations and representations of past experiences; providing a valuable perspective on learner



autonomy, and it is an opportunity to evaluate the methods from a pedagogical perspective.

As described in section 3.3.2.2, in addressing the question of the impact of the inquiry process on the learner autonomy of the IGMs, I analyse and interpret the following data sources: the Reflective Paragraphs (RPs) that the IGMs were asked to write on completion of the inquiry process; Vs and FNs documenting dialogue between the IGMs during the inquiry sessions; and records of communication between the IGMs and me between sessions and after the inquiry. I used the same method of analysis, interpretation and representation as that used for the MNs and CNAs in Chapter 4. At the end of each IGMs' penultimate session in the inquiry, I gave them the following prompt to facilitate the writing of the RP:

“Reflect on the whole Qualitative Explorers experience from beginning to end and write a paragraph to share with the group. Consider all aspects of the experience. Bring the paragraph to the next session.”

I deliberately avoided prescriptive details so as not to lead the IGMs to any of my own preconceived conclusions, which led them to interpretate the tasks in a variety of ways (see appendix 5.10 to 5.15 for the resulting RPs). This meant some of them focused more on their conclusions on the results of the inquiry rather than the impact it had on them, limiting their value for the purposes of this section. This could be considered a weakness in the method in that it undermined the relevance of the data to the question, but my rationale was to preserve the autonomy of the IGMs in the method of the inquiry, as I had throughout, and to preserve their voice; and in conjunction with all other available data, the RPs generally provided valuable insights into the relevant processes.

I conclude that within the inquiry process, the learner autonomy of the IGMs was manifested in self-discovery (discussed in section 5B.2), self-definition (section 5B.3) and self-acceptance (section 5B.4), resonating with the findings of the SLI.

## 5B.2 “I could realize how my identity modified into open-minded and intercultural one”: discovering and defining the self

Discovery of the self was a prominent theme in the data on manifestations of learner autonomy in the inquiry process. As this self-discovery resulted from the articulation of their experiences and self-concept through the MNs and in dialogue during the sessions it was inevitably intertwined with the process of defining the self. “Self-discovery” also lay at the heart of inquiry groups conception of learner autonomy that resulted from their SLI (most explicitly demonstrated in the Gr1PECR1, figure 5.18), which also resonates closely with the theory of personal autonomy that I described in section 2.4.

The IGMs (and also the participants in Group 2’s SLI) expressed gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on their trajectories through NLAU and the objective view of their lives that it afforded: Ayuka wrote in her RP (see appendix 5.10), “I was able to see my path at NLAU objectively by listening to what other student researchers said” and Yamato wrote in his RP (see appendix 5.12), “this process helped me have an objective view to analyze what affected my learning and how I have exercised control over my own learning”. This objective perspective, enabled the discovery of hitherto unconscious aspects of the self (their ‘divided self’ in Meyers’ (2005) terms); and a better understanding of NLAU and their relationship with it - I refer to this as their ‘emplaced self’ (which is constituted in the interplay between Meyers’ (2005) ‘embodied’, ‘relational’ and ‘social’ selves in relation to a specific place).

The reflection and self-scrutiny necessitated by the inquiry framework often resulted in a confessional atmosphere. Wakako was moved to tears more than once, Yuko likened the sessions to “therapy” and Yamato said drily after completing his CNA in session 5, “this is the first time to confess my ugly personality” (V5). This was largely due to the dialogue involved in the CNA, in which they spent more than an hour scrutinising the experiences of each IGM. This, perhaps inevitably, resulted in revelations. For instance, Yamato, on considering the reasons for his perceived passivity, concluded that it was rooted in cowardice: as quoted in subsection 4.4.2, he said, “I didn’t take any concrete action or active decision making so I didn’t have

to face any difficulties [...]. All I know is I am a chicken". Recognition of this led him to resolve to overcome this fear and develop strategies for doing so.

In addition to the dialogue, Yuko and Yamato wrote in their RPs that the construction of their MNs also revealed aspects of their selves that had previously been obscure to them. This issue also arose during Yuko's CNA, in session 17; I asked Yuko about the process of creating her MN:

Me:        So when you were drawing this, did you have this image in your mind or did it kind of evolve on the paper?

Yuko:     It evolved on the paper. I was... I wanted to draw something about myself in education myself in terms of like, "what does learning mean to me?" and yeah, it just came. I wasn't really thinking about doing this. At the beginning, I had, you know, maybe it would be cool if I had like a face in the middle and then the body and then it's something going on here and then outside but that's about it. I didn't really think it was going to be like, "oh, negative!" and "oh, positive". It turned out that way. So, I guess, I guess I feel that it's always something inside of me that's pulling myself down. Because I mean, people give a lot of positive influence to me and environment around me. It isn't that bad. It's great, but I guess it's just what's going on in my head is always the obstacle.

Then, later in session 20, she said that the drawing had really helped her to visualise her position on study and education. These are examples of how participation in the inquiry led to increased knowledge of the divided self.

The data suggests that participation in the inquiry also helped the IGMs to better understand their relationship with the NLAU context: the role that NLAU had in shaping them and the active role they had played as participants in NLAU. For instance, Wakako concluded that her trajectory through NLAU aligned with NLAU's stated educational agenda, acknowledging the role that NLAU's institutional framework had had in her development. In her RP she wrote:

“The environment of this university pretty differs from other universities in Japan, which affects students['] motivation and attitude as well. [...] I was surprised that somehow other senior students also thought the same things. They underwent “zasetu” at some point, which let them notice themselves to be changed. It was my first time to think students’ learning environment. However, it was written in NLAU mission, and also it is what RA thinks. NLAU mission states that NLAU environment allows student to enhance their international abilities and also to liberate themselves from stereotypical thoughts and ideas. As for RAs, they try to make the residential community where residents can learn from each other by spending time with others and conflicting each other to overcome issues. I feel I could take the path which was ideal for NLAU students somehow.”

Yuko also concluded that she had gained an awareness of her relationship with the NLAU context, but she, influenced by the work of Freire (1974), became aware of the active role she played in her emplaced constitution. In her RP, she wrote:

“I knew that I ‘learned’ something through my NLAU experience but could not define or give a clear explanation what skill I gained. By listening to others’ views on learning and discussing multimodal, I realized that I had learned to ‘integrate’ to this complex learning environment as ‘Subject’ that Paulo Freire defines. Paulo Freire (1974) states that “integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality” and that “the integrated person is person as Subject (p.4)”. Whereas ‘ad[a]ption’ is a stage where a person would lose capacity to make a choice and has nothing but to ‘adjust’ to the situation as the ‘object’.”

Yuko’s active role in the social constitution of NLAU is more salient than most, having established the Diversity Club, being a member of the student government and being an engaged and vocal member of the community, perhaps aiding in her recognition of it.

Since increasing IGMs' knowledge of their relationship with their context was the intended outcome of the methods, that it was successful could be considered a banal observation, but it constituted an important aspect of their autonomy. Recognising one's emplaced self, requires knowledge of one's embodied self, in the sense of being physically in a space – there were numerous references to the role of physical spaces in the students' lives; it requires knowledge of one's relational self, since much of their experience at NLAU is interpersonal; and the IGMs' recognition of their relationship with NLAU's culture, constitutes knowledge of their social selves. As I have argued exhaustively, self-knowledge is central to learner autonomy.

Then, Yuko's recognition of her "critical capacity to make choices and to transform [her] reality" resonates with Castoriadis' (1991) notion of 'collective autonomy' (discussed in section 2.4), which entails that members of a collective are aware of and actively engaged in the social structures that shape them. Yuko extended this engaged critical awareness beyond the context of NLAU, to education more broadly. In her RP, she wrote:

"Through this research, I also started to be more critical of the system of education. I used to blindly believe in the power of education, as giving me innovative power and making me more competitive member of society. Education, in some sense, was like a messiah, the only hope for me to get out of poverty and my feeling of inferiority. By thinking about 'learning' and my experience and struggles at NLAU, I started to realize that university education is an institution where society, economy, and politics are complexly intertwined. Realizing that education was no longer a savior, I went through a phase of despair while working on my multimodal narrative. My first draft of my multimodal narrative (see appendix 5.16 and this is also represented in the top part of her MN, as noted in section 4.7) represented my despair towards education and to myself as a blind follower of illusion educational institution gave me. However, through listening to others' achievements at NLAU and realizing what my younger colleagues, my little brothers and sisters, have become, I was able to realize my growth as well. The second draft of my narrative represents myself raising from despair

through ‘taking control over learning.’ I am still taking part of this system of education, but I am no longer a slave to its illusion but a critical and continuous participant.”

Here I have focused on discovery of the divided and the emplaced selves, and in Chapter 4, which focused on the impact of their time at NLAU on their learner autonomy, discovery of their social self was a prominent theme. This points to an important methodological issue: it is not possible to clearly distinguish between revelations that occurred during (that were, perhaps a result of) the inquiry and those that occurred prior to the onset of the inquiry. It is reasonable to conclude that most (if not all) of the IGMs’ revelations resulted from experiences prior to the onset of the inquiry but the implications with regards to their learner autonomy were made explicit within the interpretive framework of the inquiry. Regardless of the point at which they gained self-knowledge, as Wakako points out in the extract above and was argued by the group in creating their Gr1 PECR, they became cognisant of their unconscious biases, which they found liberational.

In learning about their selves through constructing their MNs and through dialogue, the IGMs not only increased their self-knowledge, they also defined themselves: they were constructing authentic discourse identities (Gee, 2000). As I pointed out in section 4.8.2, the distinction between the discourse identity work that took place during and prior to the inquiry is inevitably blurred yet, as I argued above, participation in the inquiry enabled them to describe themselves on the basis of increased self-knowledge, which entails greater authenticity (Sneddon, 2013; Taylor, 1991). Throughout the inquiry, the IGMs defined themselves by making statements that explicitly characterised them. For instance, Wakako wrote in her RP:

“I knew I changed a lot, but I could not explain how exactly I changed. Once we discussed what specifically influenced my learning, I could realize how my identity modified into open-minded and intercultural one.”

Similarly, as I described in Chapter 4, during the inquiry, the IGMs reified their relationships with CoPs and, in doing so, defined themselves. Among these were

statements of life plans, which project themselves into the future. Subsection 4.3.3, described Arisa's plan to become a sustainability researcher in Akita and, as described in subsection 4.2.3, Ayuka spoke of her plan to help immigrant children in her hometown. In most cases, as with other forms of identity work, it is not possible to categorically attribute definition of life plans to the inquiry, as opposed to time at NLAU prior to the inquiry (and to do so would undermine my claims about the impact of the NLAU context on the learner autonomy of its students). In Yuko's case, however, she explicitly attributed her life plan to her participation in the inquiry. In her RP, she wrote:

“This experience also made me more interested in becoming an educator. After all, it is education and the participants of education who could ‘take control of learning,’ and change the system of education.”

Such defining of the self - through characterising oneself in discourse and deciding life plans - on the basis of self-knowledge lies at the heart of the theory of learner autonomy that I described in section 2.4 and, thus, constitute manifestations of learner autonomy in the inquiry process.

### 5B.3 “I learned to forgive and accept myself for who I am. I no longer feel inferior”: self-acceptance

With greater knowledge of their social self came what the inquiry group described in their SLI (section 5A.5) as “self-acceptance”. They found that there was a tendency among the students to react to struggles with a sense of inferiority but by better understanding the sociohistorical causes of their struggles they felt less inferior. This was explicitly expressed by the mature students in the inquiry group, Yuko and Akari, who both referred to a sense of inferiority in their RPs. Yuko wrote:

“As an adult student who came to NLAU and as a person who had struggled with low socioeconomic status, I was desperate to get ‘educated.’ I did not have a clear idea of what learning or education meant. I thought of education

as something like a saviour that would finally give me answer to my question of inequality and feeling of inferiority I felt as someone without a college degree. Through working this project, I was able to think about what 'education' and 'learning' means to me by looking back at my experiences at NLAU. Through this project, I learned to forgive and accept myself for who I am. I no longer feel inferior. Not just because I am about to get my first college degree, but I am able to see myself from a different perspective."

Yuko expressed this sentiment a number of times during our inquiry sessions, and then three years later, while writing the original draft of this section, I contacted her to tell her how insightful I was still finding her contribution to the study and she replied: "[w]orking with you helped me to come to terms with my identity as bicultural/bilingual self and made me decide what I wanted to do." (This exchange took place on the LINE social media platform on 3-9-20).

In Akari's case, recognising the central role of disruptive experiences in the trajectories of many students helped her see her own struggles positively. She wrote in her RP:

"When I was in high school and two-year women's college, I rarely felt inferiority to my English proficiency. However, since the range of students' English proficiency and financial background at NLAU are wider and more diverse than there, I have been disappointed at my language skills because even though students have various level of proficiency, classes require same amount of assignments and quality of presentations. I need longer time to do everything than those who have English background. However, throughout this research, I realized that NLAU students more or less in the same environment have gone through the experience of *zasetsu* which is kind of the rite of passage after moving outside a comfort zone."

I argue that the self-acceptance that Yuko and Akari describe is, in MacKenzie and Stoljar's (2000a) terms, an increase in self-respect, which has a mutual relationship with self-trust and self-worth (as discussed in section 2.4). These conditions are the



emotional foundations upon which the exercise of the autonomy competency rests (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000a), which according to what I have described here have a mutual relationship with discovering and defining the self.

## 5B.4 Conclusions on the impact of the inquiry on the learner autonomy of the inquiry group members

To some degree, my conclusions on the effects on the learner autonomy of the IGMs of participation in the inquiry mirror the conclusions of the inquiry group on learner autonomy in NLAU. Perhaps the reason for this is that both the challenges of NLAU life and the framework of the inquiry prompted the kinds of self-reflection that are fundamental to autonomy. According to the SLI, the complex environment of NLAU often causes self-doubt in students, which demonstrated potential to initiate the process of self-discovery, self-development, self-acceptance and taking (authentic) action, identified by the inquiry group. It should also be noted, however, as was occasionally mentioned during the inquiry, the challenges of NLAU are not always met with positive results – indeed, identity crises carry significant risks: there are students who take extended leaves of absence, or leave entirely, and suicides among the students have occurred (although I can only speculate about the causes of these cases). Nevertheless, the learner autonomy process identified by the inquiry group was, to some extent, mirrored within the framework of the inquiry. Reflection afforded by representing and interpreting (through introspection and through dialogue) their experiences at NLAU from the perspective of their learner autonomy, offered the IGMs opportunities to increase their self-knowledge, which went hand in hand with self-definition and, in some cases led to self-acceptance. In this way, participation in the inquiry offered potential affordances for the development of the learner autonomy of the IGMs in what could be described as a more controlled manner than would the usual ravages of NLAU life. This signifies the fulfilment of the methodological criteria of ethicality, laid out in subsection 3.2.5. In the following chapter, recurring themes from this chapter and Chapter 4 will be synthesised in relation to literature relating to learner autonomy, explicitly positioning it within, and enabling critique of the field.

# Chapter 6 – Synthesis

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I synthesise findings from Chapters 4 and 5 with literature on learner autonomy, identity, personal autonomy, space and place and organisational studies in addressing the question of how learner autonomy is manifested in NLAU. Through this process, I develop a succinct theory of learner autonomy, indicating how it builds upon existing theory, which I argue fails to fully account for the *autonomy* in learner autonomy. In addressing this overarching question, I consider the data in relation to the secondary research questions: the question of how NLAU students construct their identities in relation to their sociocultural, physical, and historical contexts is addressed in section 6.2; how they exercise control over these processes is addressed in section 6.3; I address the affordances and constraints on the processes involved, in the NLAU context, in section 6.4. I then conclude the chapter in section 6.5.

## 6.2 Identity construction: contextualising the self

This section addresses the secondary research question of how NLAU students construct their identities in relation to their sociocultural, physical and historical contexts, which was informed by research on learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective (Lamb, 2013; Toohey and Norton, 2003). Such research, as discussed in section 2.3, draws on Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory (SLT) to conceive learning as identity construction. Throughout Chapters 4 and 5, I have drawn on a number of theories of identity (such as Gee's (2000) 'institutional' and 'discourse' identities, in subsections 4.4.1, 4.5.1, 4.7.1, 4.8.2 and section 5B.3, and Snow and Anderson's (1987) 'associational embracing' and 'associational distancing', in subsections 4.6.2 and 4.8.3), in addition to SLT, in interpreting episodes described in the data to account for processes for which SLT seemed to lack specificity. However, fundamental to the theory of identity presented in this thesis, I argue, is Wenger's

(1998a) proposition (in his development of SLT) that our identity is contingent on 'three modes of belonging' (first described in section 2.3).

According to Wenger's (1998a) proposition, identities are constructed through the reification (in (d)iscourse) of individuals' relationships with their social contexts, which are constituted partly in 'engagement' – Wenger's (1998a) first mode of belonging, denoting embodied participation one's immediate social context - and partly, in the second mode of belonging, 'imagination' of their position in broader sociohistorical contexts. Reification of imagined identities enables the third mode of belonging, 'alignment', in which individuals focus their engagement in line with broader social structures and societal enterprises. In this way, students' embodied practice (constituting their engagement with their immediate social context) and (d)iscourse in which their identities are reified have a mutual relationship in the construction of their identities: when they or others speak of their engagement or imagined positions in broader social structures, their identities are reified, which, in turn, influences subsequent engagement.

Although I have referred to Wenger's (1998a) three modes of belonging in reference to the data earlier (in subsection 4.3.2), owing to the fundamental position I ascribe to it here, I now bring all of the identity construction described in Chapters 4 and 5 under the umbrella of this theory. Such a conceptualisation succinctly addresses the secondary research question cited above and explicitly connects this inquiry to other learner autonomy research that draws on SLT, thereby highlighting its empirical contribution to that area of research. This then provides a base from which I argue that, while providing a satisfactory account of learning, research that relies solely on SLT fails to fully account for the *autonomy* in learner autonomy. I seek to address this shortfall in section 6.3.

There are three subsections in this section. In subsection 6.2.1, I describe the way NLAU students construct their identities through their engagement with their immediate social context and, in subsection 6.2.2, how they constructed their identities through imagination and alignment. Finally, in subsection 6.2.3, I outline how the section addresses the primary research question and the contribution it makes to the field before identifying the failings of learner autonomy research that relies solely on SLT.

### *6.2.1 Constructing identity through engagement with the immediate social context*

Data discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 represented NLAU students engaging with their immediate social context through their relationships with Communities of Practice (CoPs, first introduced in section 2.3 – a concept that is central to SLT and the primary means of Wenger’s (1998a) ‘engagement’), and by participating in friendships. I distinguish immediate social context, as consisting of direct interactions with other people, from the broader social context that might include cultures, institutions and imagined communities that exist across space and time (which are discussed in the next subsection). CoPs that were identified during the inquiry were:

- Extracurricular clubs and circles (as identified by Group 1 in their Collaborative Conceptual Representation (Gr1CCR), discussed in section 5A.5 and in Group 2’s Post-Ethnographic Conceptual Representation (Gr2PECR), discussed in section 5A.12), such as the Kanto Club (first identified in Arisa’s trajectory, in subsection 4.3.2) and the Diversity Club (which played a significant role in the trajectories of Yamato and Yuko, as discussed in 4.4.1)
- Academic CoPs, such as NLAU classes (referenced in the Gr1PECR and Gr2PECR, in sections 5A.5 and 5A.12), PBL programs (as mentioned by Arisa in 4.3.3 and referenced in the Gr1PECR) and research CoPs (including the ‘rural sustainability research CoPs’ and the ‘peace scholar’, described in Arisa and Akari’s MNs, in sections 4.3 and 4.5 respectively); the Bridge Program (first discussed by Yuko in 4.7.2) which is an academic CoP, but also has broader sociocultural implications
- The Japanese student abroad CoP (described by Wakako in subsection 4.6.2)
- The Japanese NLAU student CoP (also referred to as the “junjapa group” by Yuko and Wakako, as discussed in subsection 4.7.2).

There are also presumably other CoPs that were not represented in the data. I should also note here that these CoPs were reified to varying degrees by the participants, and their definition as CoPs is a product of my interpretation of the data.

Of the relationships students had with the above CoPs, some were of participation and others were of non-participation. The CoPs mentioned above could be considered to constitute a “constellation” of CoPs (Wenger, 1998a: 127) because they have members in common, they are mostly proximal to one another, many of them serve NLAU’s educative agenda and have related enterprises. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that any student could participate in them all. In fact, it is more likely that most students have relationships of non-participation with most of the CoPs, particularly when they first arrive at NLAU. A number of such instances were represented in the data. For example, Yamato initially felt unable to participate in what he perceived to be the ‘NLAU student CoP’, due to his perceived inferiority in English communication and lack of intercultural experience, as described in subsection 4.4.1, and there were echoes of this among the accounts of the interviewees in the Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry of Groups 1 and 2 (Gr1SLEI and Gr2SLEI), discussed in sections 5A.4 and 5A.11 respectively. Furthermore, although not represented in the data (since they are unlikely to be significant to the research participants), it is also likely that students have no interest in or intention to participate in many of the existent CoPs, a situation that is relatively inconsequential to their identities.

There were also cases where students desired to participate in a CoP but were prevented from doing so by a lack of competence in the practice of the community, which resulted in peripheral participation. In some cases of peripheral participation, individuals were prevented indefinitely from full participation, resulting in “marginalised” (Wenger, 1998a: 168) identity trajectories in relation to those CoPs. As discussed in subsection 4.7.2, Yuko was prevented from fully participating in the ‘Japanese NLAU student CoP’ (or ‘junpapa CoP’) because of her migration history and associated sociocultural experience, and the institutional identity of a ‘bridge student’; this led to her marginalisation from this group. Similarly, Interviewee 11 (I11) in Gr1SLEI (documented in section 5A.4) reported that she felt that degree-seeking international students from non-English speaking countries were also marginalised from the ‘Japanese NLAU student CoP’. Ayuka, in subsection 4.4.2, and some of the interviewees in Gr2SLEI (section 5A.11) also spoke of marginalisation, from student communities on their study abroad (I7, I8 and I22).

There were, however, also instances of peripheral participation that showed promise of increasingly central participation: “inbound trajectories” (Wenger, 1998a: 154). Instances of such identity trajectories were Yamato’s efforts to develop his English, and to become “more active” and “passionate” and identifying more closely with the ‘Japanese NLAU student CoP’ (which I distinguish from the ‘NLAU student CoP’ that he initially felt marginalised from). In doing so, he found ways to circumvent his language difficulties in participating in the Basic Education (BE) classes; these processes were described in subsection 4.4.2. Akari’s initiatives of holding peace studies workshops, attending peace studies events and meeting renowned peace scholars, described in subsection 4.5.1, indicate that she was on an inbound trajectory into the ‘peace scholar CoP’ (contingent on some day attaining an institutional identity as a peace scholar, without which she risks marginalisation).

In time, students often become central participants in some of the CoPs. For instance, Ayuka and Arisa visually represented themselves as central participants in their EAP classes in their MNs (figures 4.2.2 and 4.3.1); as the founding president of the Diversity Club, Yuko was unambiguously a central participant in that CoP; and Arisa’s participation in the Kanto club, discussed in subsection 4.3.2, appeared to be central, considering the time she invested in it and its importance to her identity. There were also students whom Yuko and Wakako identified as central to the ‘Japanese NLAU student CoP’ (in contrast to themselves), in subsections 4.6.2 and 4.7.2. More central participation suggests greater investment, making CoPs in which students participate centrally more significant to their identities.

Although participation in the practices of CoPs is the primary mode of engagement according to Wenger (1998a), as I argued in subsections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2 in relation to Wakako’s trajectory, friendships should be considered a distinct means of engagement with one’s social context. Friendships involve belonging, both through engagement and through imagination; the former is discussed here and the latter in the following subsection. Friendships are not necessarily (and probably are not) CoPs, but participation in friendships involves identity work: they are the site in which much of the (d)iscourse through which our identities are constructed; for instance – we talk about who we think we are and/or who we want to be with our friends. This was

evident in conversations between Yuko and Wakako (who are friends) during the research sessions (documented in sections 4.6, 4.7 and 5A.8 to 5A.13).

To summarise, the data suggests that NLAU students engage with their immediate social context through participation (and non-participation) in CoPs and through friendships. Reification of the above engagement through (d)iscourse enables the construction of relationships with the broader sociohistorical context through imagination, which offers potential for alignment with broader social enterprises. Perhaps the best example of such interaction between engagement, imagination and alignment was Arisa's engagement in the Kanto Club, which led to a deeper sense of belonging in Akita (imagination) and her dedication to working for the sustainability of Akita's rural way of life (alignment), as was described in subsection 4.3.2. These broader associations are discussed next.

### *6.2.2 Constructing identity in relation to broader sociohistorical contexts through imagination and alignment*

The study suggests that NLAU students construct their identities by positioning themselves relative to communities and other social entities across space and time, beyond their immediate social context; by means of imagination and alignment. These include communities associated with specific geographical areas, such as those of Akita's urban and rural areas, the students' hometowns, study abroad locations and Japan. There were also geographically dispersed communities based on affinity, ideology or shared ethnicity or heritage, which might include global "constellations of practice" (Wenger, 1998a: 126), such as the broader academic communities and institutions. Relationships with these broader social configurations may be merely theoretical – in the imaginations and (d)iscourses of the students – or students may align their engagement with them.

Several such social configurations could be identified in the data. Communities associated with specific geographical areas beyond their own direct interpersonal experience included:

- The broader NLAU community (as highlighted in discussions between Wakako and Yuko about NLAU's social dynamics, in sections 4.6 and 4.7)
- The institutions of NLAU and other specific universities (as demonstrated by Akari's efforts to transfer from NLAU to other universities, described in 4.5.1)
- Akita's local community (as in Arisa's attachment to Akita, described in 4.3.3)
- Japanese society (most saliently demonstrated by Yuko's reflections on her position as a kikokushijo in Japanese society, described in 4.7.2 and 5A.9.1)
- The hometowns of the students (significant to Ayuka, subsection 4.2.3, and Arisa, 4.3.2)
- The societies of the study abroad destinations (salient in the trajectories of Ayuka, 4.2.2, Arisa, 4.3.3, Wakako, 4.6.1 and 4.6.2, and a number of the interviewees in Gr2SLEI, as described in section 5A.11).

Geographically dispersed communities based on affinity, ideology, race or heritage, included:

- The LGBTQ community (significant to Yuko, 4.7.1, and Wakako, 4.6.2)
- Christianity (central to Ayuka's trajectory, 4.2.1, and significant to I1 in Gr1SLEI, section 5A.4)
- Ethnic minority communities (as in Ayuka's affinity with ethnic minorities in the US, 4.2.2, and her renewed perspective on the Japanese Brazilian communities in her hometown, 4.2.3)
- Global research and academic communities, such as the 'peace scholar community' (described by Akari, 4.5.1) or the 'rural sustainability research community' (described by Arisa, 4.3.3)
- The institutions and employment sectors in which students hoped to work after graduation.

There were instances of students whose relationships with these social entities remained *imaginary*. For instance, Ayuka's relationship with the immigrant community of her study abroad destination, and its position within the broader community, was mostly imagined, except perhaps for her change of church, from a predominantly white church to a predominantly black church, described in subsection 4.4.2. There were also students whose imagined relationship with their broader social context changed. For example, in discussions documented in Section 5A.5, Yamato speaks of a change in the



way he imagines his future in Japanese society, from an assumption that he would graduate from NLAU and get a graduate position in a job for life, to his decision to pursue a less conventional path in a career in something that interests him. There were also echoes of such changes in perspective in the Gr2SLEI data, section 5A.11 (I16 from phase 1 and I6 from phase 2).

Also evident were cases in which students were aware of the relationship they were expected to have with a broader social context but struggled with or resisted such identifications. For instance, Yamato was aware that his participation in the NLAU student CoP should mean that he identified as an NLAU student, but he felt that his “personality” did not fit (described in 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). Gr1SLEI-I11 (section 5A.4) also felt this and Gr2SLEI-I6 (section 5A.11) felt that she did not belong in NLAU. Similarly, Akari was aware that her institutional identity meant that she should be a part of the broader NLAU enterprise, but she resisted it and sought to belong to another university (subsection 4.5.1). Yuko’s (and to a lesser extent Wakako’s) imagined relationship with Japanese society became ambiguous as a result of their intercultural experiences – they felt that they no longer belonged (4.6.2 and 4.7.2). Arisa ceased to identify with her hometown (4.3.2). Some students interviewed in the SLEI worried that being at NLAU would alter their position in Japanese society (Gr1SLEI I9 and I12, in section 5A.4). I would argue that a sense of *not* belonging also constitutes a part of one’s identity and can prompt attempts at reconciliation through negotiation (a point which will be taken up in the next section). There were echoes of such ambivalence throughout Chapters 4 and 5, pointing to its significance, and is indeed a point to which I return later.

NLAU students were also found to reify their identities in terms of their imagined position in relation to different friendship groups within the NLAU community. For example, in an instance of associational embracing and distancing (Snow and Anderson, 1987)(first discussed in subsection 4.6.2), Yuko and Wakako, embraced whom they perceived to be non-junjapa students and distanced themselves from those who they conceived as junjapa students; they did this in dialogue described in subsections 4.6.2 and 4.7.2. Frequent references, in the MNs and in the SLEIs, to friendships with international students indicate a form of associational embracing that seems to be common among Japanese students in NLAU.

There were also cases in which students imagined their position within a broader social configuration, which led to the *alignment* of their energies with them. For example, Ayuka was a practicing Christian, which meant she aligned her activities with the broader Christian community, as she conceived it: she attended a church and bible club and oriented her life plan to helping the vulnerable and oppressed (subsection 4.2.1). Yuko, Arisa, Akari and many of the interviewees in the SLEI framed much of their activity in terms of global academic communities. All students, to varying degrees, align their energies with the NLAU institution in their attempts to develop their English, pursue a high GPA, or attain the necessary TOEFL score. Wakako (4.6.1) and Arisa (4.3.2) participated in rice planting and other local traditions, which aligned them with what they imagined to be rural life in Akita. Many students, such as Ayuka, Arisa, Akari and some interviewees from the SLEI identified a career goal and aligned their efforts to their chosen fields. Ayuka aligned her efforts to the enterprises of her hometown (as described in 4.2.3). Wakako aligned her behaviour with what could be interpreted as a global cosmopolitan community - “Doing crazy things with international students” - transgressing perceived Japanese cultural norms (4.6.2). Finally, Yuko took a more active role in shaping the agenda of a constellation of practice with which she identified - the LGBTQ movement - by establishing and facilitating the activities of the Diversity Club (which was initially named the LGBT Club)(first mentioned by Yamato in 4.4.1); in doing so, she took a defining role in aligning the energy of herself and others with the broader enterprises of the LGBTQ movement and was active in defining the meaning of their activities.

In these ways, NLAU students constructed their identities in relation to communities and social entities across time and space, by imagining their positions relative to them and, in some cases, by aligning their engagement with them.

### *6.2.3 Section conclusion – where is the autonomy in learner autonomy?*

This section addressed the secondary research question, of how NLAU students construct their identities in relation to their sociocultural, physical and historical contexts, by utilising Wenger’s (1998a) three modes of belonging - engagement,

imagination and alignment – as a lens through which to interpret data representing the trajectories of NLAU students. I would argue that this explicitly addressed the students' relationships with their sociocultural and historical contexts, but the role of physical context has thus far remained implied. This point will be addressed explicitly in section 6.4, in relation to how students' learner autonomy was afforded and constrained in the context of NLAU. In terms of the overarching question of how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of NLAU, one could argue that the interpretive work in this section is sufficient. From the perspective of previous research on learner autonomy that draws on SLT (Gu, 2014; Lamb, 2013; Toohey and Norton, 2003) it may be: I have identified ways in which NLAU students are “differentially positioned” (Toohey and Norton, 2003: 65) within their social contexts, and how this relates to the construction of their identity. As Gu (2014) concluded, we could argue that the individuality of the students is constructed through these relationships. However, I feel that more work must be done to understand the “agency” in “socially oriented agency” (Toohey and Norton, 2003: 59)(as learner autonomy is often defined from a sociocultural perspective); or the ‘control’ in control over learning, as learner autonomy is more broadly defined (Benson, 2011).

Earlier research on learner autonomy utilising SLT implies that learners are autonomous if they construct their identities by participating in CoPs through their own agency, which requires them to “identify themselves, resist identifications, and act on their social worlds” (Norton and Toohey, 2002: 123). Lamb (2013) adds that “the autonomous learner could be said to be the one who is travelling along the trajectory that (s)he wants to”. These definitions reflect sociocultural perspectives on learning but considering the whole life perspective implied by this view, it is a failing that they do not account for the authenticity of the desires or values that guide agency because they ignore issues arising from the sociohistorical constitution of the self. Being said to have *agency* in the construction of one's identity, implies that the origin of one's actions resides in one's self. Gu (2014: 133) explicitly addresses this, to some extent, but concludes that “different values, perceptions and behaviours are socially constructed, rather than individually enacted”. Although she does not deny the possibility of agency in choosing values, she leaves it in question. Since our values are a part of our selves, if no autonomy is exercised in the construction of the self, choices made by that self would

be heteronomous – the origin of those choices would lie outside of the self. I argue that for a coherent sociocultural account of learner autonomy, the role and *authenticity* of values (the basis on which autonomous choices are made, as I argued in section 2.4) in relation to sociohistorical context must be explained. This is a gap that I argue is addressed in the IGMs' emphasis on the role of "zasetsu" in prompting the kind of reflection that leads to "self-discovery", "self-development", "self-acceptance" and "taking action" (as documented in 5A.5), which is how they conceived learner autonomy. Thus, in the next section, through examining NLAU students' critical experiences from the perspective of personal autonomy, I attempt to identify the 'control' in learner autonomy.

### 6.3 From disruption to control: critical experiences as opportunities for increased autonomy

In this section, I address the secondary research question of how NLAU students *exercise control* over the construction of their identities (or, their learning, as I have conceived it in this research). Through their Student-Led Inquiry (SLI), documented in Chapter 5, the inquiry group concluded that experiences that were disruptive to the identities of NLAU students, while carrying risks to their emotional wellbeing, could be instrumental in prompting kinds of reflection that increased learner autonomy. In interpreting these conclusions in terms of theories of identity, learner autonomy and personal autonomy, and relating them to all of the available data, the central roles played by emotions, (d)iscourse, self-knowledge, values and choices in the process of exercising control in the construction of one's identity (i.e., in learning) are brought to the fore. Below, I describe these processes in terms of the relevant theory before grounding them in the experiences of NLAU students as represented in the data, in subsections 6.3.1 to 6.3.5. After which, I conclude the section, relating my findings to the literature.

NLAU is particularly impactful on the identities of its students, in large part, because it contrasts significantly with their previous contexts. The central role played by English in both academic and social life, and the diversity of the student body, in addition to the

novel classroom expectations, mean that they “have both physically and symbolically crossed the border ... between one way of being and another” (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000: 174). This results in “critical experiences” which Block (2002: 5) characterised as:

“[P]rolonged contact with an L2 and a different cultural setting caus[ing] irreversible destabilization of the individual’s sense of self. There is, in a sense, an element of before and after in critical experiences as the individual’s sociohistorical, cultural and linguistic environment, once well defined and delimited, becomes relatively ill defined and open-ended.”

As noted above, in reference to the findings of the SLI, I argue that such critical experiences often prompted the kind of reflection and dialogue that can enhance learner autonomy. When undergoing critical experiences, one feels ambivalence, a recognition that one’s identity trajectories arising from other contexts conflict with the demands of the new context. This recognition can bring identities into sharp relief: as Mercer (1990: 43) points out, “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by doubt and uncertainty”.

From the perspective of personal autonomy, as it was defined in section 2.4, an increased awareness of our identity constitutes an increase in ‘self-knowledge’, a pre-condition for personal autonomy (Sneddon, 2013), and what causes the critical experience is an expansion of the individual’s “horizons of significance” (Taylor, 1991: 66): the aspects of our social context from which we draw our *values*, or “ideas for possible ways of living” (Taylor, 1991: 66). When confronted with new values that contrast with our own, we are prompted to evaluate not only the new values, but also our pre-existing values – Taylor (1985a) terms this “strong evaluation” - which can lead to changes in our value system. This enables us to ‘self-shape’ in the two ways described in section 2.4: ‘type 1’ – making choices and acting on the basis of our values (of which our awareness is heightened by the process described above); ‘type 2’ - choosing new values or reaffirming our existing values. And when we self-shape, we are autonomous (Sneddon, 2013). However, the exercise of the skills involved in strong evaluation depends on the emotional conditions of ‘self-trust’, ‘self-worth’ and ‘self-respect’

(Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000a), which are potentially undermined by such disruptive experiences.

As I argued in section 2.4, strong evaluation is dependent on competencies that are socially mediated, historically and/or contemporaneously (Meyers, 1987). Bringing the discussion to the present inquiry, the sociohistorical context of NLAU students, on which strong evaluation is contingent, includes NLAU and, in the case of the IGMs, it includes the framework of the inquiry. Therefore, it is important to note that in the reflective and dialogical processes involved in constructing data on their experiences, the IGMs (and to a lesser extent their SLEI interviewees) defined themselves in a way that often involved strong evaluation. However, the object of these processes was prior experiences, which probably also included strong evaluation. In other words, the inquiry facilitated autonomy related reflection and dialogue in the IGMs, the object of which was prior autonomy related processes. In conversations about the layered structure of the inquiry, Terry Lamb, my supervisor, likened it to a palimpsest, which I feel aptly describes it.

As noted above, through their inquiry, the IGMs identified disruption to students' identities and subsequent efforts to reconcile them as central to learner autonomy in NLAU. The phenomena that Block (2002, 2007) terms critical experiences, the IGMs termed "zasetu" (section 5.3), "challenges" (section 5.3), "difficulties" (section 5.3), "identity crises" (section 5.13), and Wakako and Yuko represented it visually as a chick pushing out and eventually hatching from an egg (figure 5.17 And 5.19). As I argued above, they deemed these experiences as not only disruptive, but as offering potential for positive transformation. Their conclusions (first documented in section 5A.5 and reiterated throughout part 5A of Chapter 5) that the potential outcomes of these experiences were 'self-discovery', 'self-development', 'self-acceptance', which enable them to 'take (authentic) action', resonate strongly with the theory that I outlined above (these conclusions, indeed, informed my own reading and interpretations of the data and related literature). In addition, they concluded that awareness of this process offers individuals potential to exercise control over it, perhaps suggesting an even more profound form of autonomy (noted by Yuko in section 5A.13). Before proceeding to review the ways that these processes were found to manifest in the lives of NLAU

students, it is important to acknowledge that such disruptions do not always have positive outcomes. Indeed, there are students whose struggles at NLAU conclude with their exit from the NLAU community. Wakako represented this risk in part of her first ICR (figure 5.15), which I extracted and enlarged in figure 6.1.

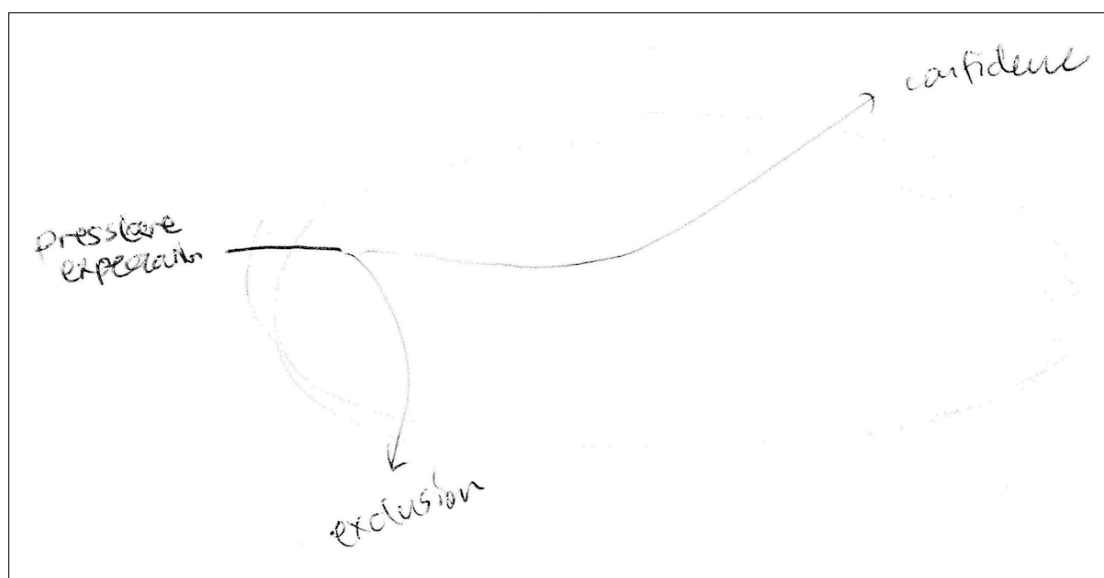


Figure 6.1. Wakako's representation of the risks involved in critical experiences, taken from her Gr2ICR3

From here, I summarise the kinds of critical experiences that were represented in the data; examining the causes, the kinds of reflection involved in reconciling them and the outcomes. I categorise them according to their causes: language difficulties, a new pedagogical environment, exclusion and rejection, exposure to different ways of life, and economic realities. Through the SLI, the IGMs concluded that, in addition to disruptions, there were also periods of stability, which they referred to as “comfort zones”, so I discuss this concept first.

### 6.3.1 “Comfort zones”: periods of relative stability

The inquiry group felt that most NLAU students came to NLAU from a relatively stable and culturally homogeneous environment. As Akari put it, quoted in Chapter 5:

“Before entering this university, students were in the comfort zone because the place where they grew up was maybe their peers, or their relatives or their family, they tend to have similar circumstances, the financial background, educational background, they go to same high school, they kinda same [...]. So they can share certain value or common sense [...](V11, 47:00).

In such an environment, they likely knew how to behave appropriately and thrive socially: they were probably relatively central participants in their CoPs. NLAU is a competitive university, so it is likely that most students had been successful in their high school environments, which, as is typical in Japan, were probably exam driven and book or lecture based. Furthermore, the relative homogeneity of values and their success in their schools meant that their horizons of significance were limited; these students had had no reason to question their values and practices. However, while resting in this comfort zone, the IGMs felt that development was limited. Only on leaving such a comfort zone is one prompted to question and learn about oneself, they insisted.

Of course, not all students had been comfortable in their circumstances before coming to NLAU. Neither Yuko nor Wakako had, for instance – Yuko, having never settled anywhere for long, felt that she had never been in a comfort zone and Wakako had found the uniformity of her high school days stifling. Nevertheless, the inquiry group argued that students often experienced *relatively* stable identities before coming to NLAU, and Yuko said in her CNA that she thought such periods of stability were necessary to develop self-esteem, which is, I have argued, necessary for the exercise of the autonomy competency. It was also evident that students have periods of stability in their identity during their time at NLAU: they succeed in reconciling their identities in some stages. Indeed, the inquiry group concluded, in section 5A.5, that the process that they identified was iterative.



### *6.3.2 Critical experiences relating to language difficulties and adapting to a new pedagogical environment*

Difficulties relating to language pervaded the data on the experiences of NLAU students. For most students, these difficulties related primarily to English, since it is the medium of academic and, to some degree, social life and, for most, an L2. However, due to the presence of non-English speaking international exchange and degree-seeking students at NLAU and the diversity of study abroad locations, issues with other languages also occurred. Issues such as these can create academic, social and corresponding psychological challenges, which constitute critical experiences and prompt the kinds of autonomy related processes described above.

The academic challenges presented by NLAU's multilingual environment was represented in a number of ways throughout the data. It was hard for many students to adapt to the demands of the EAP classroom environment, which required active participation and communication in English, contrasting with that of their high school English classes. Yamato spoke of such difficulties in his MN and CNA (in subsection 4.4.1), stating that it left him "feeling both excite[d] and afraid". Gr1SLEI-I7 (in section 5A.4) also spoke of this challenge. In addition, attaining the necessary TOEFL score was an obstacle for many. It was a central theme in Akari's trajectory – "it took two years to get TOEFL 550. It's really... DARK (*wry laugh*). Dark history of NLAU life", she said during the SLI (FN7), and Arisa, in her CNA, also spoke of difficulties with the TOEFL (subsection 4.3.1), and there were echoes of this in the SLEI interviews. There was also a sense that the challenges increased on the transition to the BE program. Yamato spoke of his struggles to understand the speech of his teachers (4.4.2) and Akari thought that, since the students were no longer streamed according to English level after EAP, many are among students who are more competent in English than them, which they find intimidating: "It's really tough psychologically", she said in conversations during the SLI (FN7). Yuko thought that English also challenged the *kikokushijo*: in many cases, their strong speaking and listening skills belie the difficulties that they suffer with reading and writing. Some of them struggle to live up to the expectations of literacy that the "junjapa" students have of them, Yuko thought. Even in cases in which students did not

note any difficulties with meeting English requirements, there was a consensus among the IGMs that because English was a mandatory part of the curriculum it was demotivating, even for students like Ayuka, for whom the English medium environment had been her main motivation for applying to NLAU.

Language related challenges were not limited to academic life; all campus life in NLAU is multilingual. The central role of English in extracurricular activities and social life means that students who are not confident in communicating in English risk becoming isolated, the inquiry group concluded in their SLI. Some students felt that they must leave temporarily in order to reach the level of English needed to thrive in NLAU; as was the case for one of Akari's interviewees (Gr1SLEI-I5, section 5A.4), who took a two-year leave of absence to work in a hotel in Hong Kong to gain confidence in communicating in English (and also Chinese) (FN8). Yamato's account of his first encounter with Yuko, in her role as Diversity Club president, in his MN, exemplifies difficulties that Japanese students can have in an English medium social environment (described in subsection 4.4.1). Non-Japanese degree-seeking students encounter challenges of a different kind: during the SLI, the inquiry group referred to a degree-seeking student from Taiwan (Gr1SLEI-11, section 5A.4) who arrived with limited ability to communicate in English and almost no Japanese language skills. In addition to the obvious language barriers that impeded her efforts to integrate, she found that the Japanese students were not interested in befriending international students who were not fluent English speakers, considering it a waste of time (I did not elaborate in this in Chapter 5, but a summary of the interview data can be found in appendix 5.3).

The above challenges hold implications for the identities of NLAU students. Yamato (subsection 4.4.1) described associated psychological challenges involved as 'zasetsu' (which, as noted above, became the favoured term used by the inquiry group to describe critical experiences) – a sense of inadequacy to the demands of the situation, in his case caused by a perceived lack of English ability. This experience was shared by many of the students interviewed during the SLEI (Gr1SLEI I1, I2, I5, Gr2SLEI Phase 1 I11 and Phase 2 I3, I5). Then when they compare themselves to those around them, this can lead to a sense of inferiority. The inquiry group, during the SLI, commented that the significance of difficulties, caused by the contrasting demands between NLAU and their

high schools, is exacerbated by the fact that many NLAU students are considered elite students and may have never previously experienced such failures (FN7). Yuko thought that an inferiority complex relating to English was ubiquitous among students who failed to qualify for the Bridge Program (over 90% of the cohort) (subsection 4.7.2). However, Wakako said that her self-esteem did not suffer in this way, despite a sense that her English was inferior, because she had not excelled in English in high school, entailing her pride did not rest on her English ability, so she warned against generalisation (FN7). This suggests that the correlation between inferiority in English and injury to general self-esteem may be contingent on how central their English prowess was to their identity. Regardless, a perceived lack of competence in English can be injurious to the pride and confidence of the students and can lead to a sense of inadequacy to the demands of the context and/or inferiority to others.

From my perspective, this phenomenon is recognised among the EAP faculty to the extent that during the EAP orientation, when we teachers are obliged to offer words of wisdom, the advice of many is “don’t compare yourself to others”. In this orientation period before students are streamed in accordance with their English proficiency, tears of dismay are common. When students are confronted with tasks that stretch them to the limits of their English ability, alongside others who seem to find them easy, they often despair. Only later when they make close friends do they realise that they were not alone in these feelings. Of course, there are students who shrink in the face of these challenges and eventually drop out of the university; I know little about what becomes of them. There are others who limp on for years without ever attaining the TOEFL scores that they need to embark on their study abroad; these students often seek distraction, like those who Yamato identified in Chapter 5, who “go out of the course (*gesturing veering off course*) [and] spend too much time on drinking and hanging out with international students” (V12, 1:14:20). There are others who rail against English and refuse to speak it because they “like Japanese”, to quote a previous student of mine. Another of my observations is that there are a significant number of students who report that they had only come to NLAU because they had failed to enter their first choice of university, NLAU being their second choice only because of its prestige. These students often fail to buy in to the English medium environment and, therefore, lack sufficient investment in learning English to thrive. There are, of course, exceptions in

this category of student – Wakako is a notable example - who embrace what NLAU has to offer and subsequently thrive. In fact, the data suggest that students are usually able to reconcile these identity conflicts.

With regards to learner autonomy, in reconciling their identities with the NLAU environment, students increase their self-knowledge and, in many cases, exercise self-direction in their language learning. In terms of self-knowledge, when students identify the root of their problems with English as the difference between the Japanese education system and that of NLAU, they take a more objective view of themselves, which enables them to see contextually derived aspects of their selves. In a similar way, the Taiwanese student initially blamed herself for her inability to make friends and communicate in English, but then she saw it was due to contextual factors that were beyond her control: Japanese students prioritise communicating with native English speakers to further their own English, due to the demands of NLAU life. Recognising the way that our social contexts have shaped us constitutes knowledge of the ‘social self’ (Meyers, 2005). Another kind of self-knowledge – ‘metacognitive knowledge’ (Wenden, 1998) – enabled some students to self-direct in their language learning. For instance, Yamato saw that his approach to learning English was not appropriate to the demands of the context, so he sought a new approach and eventually developed fluency and went on to make friends in English. Arisa and Akari also described self-direction in their efforts to attain the necessary TOEFL score: Arisa sought help outside of the curriculum by attending the AAC and working independently in the LDIC, and Akari travelled to libraries all over Akita City seeking language learning resources and even took a course in second language acquisition to develop the metacognitive knowledge she needed to reach her goal, which she eventually did. Here we see two often complementary approaches to reconciling one’s identity with a challenging new environment: adjusting one’s self-concept by means of increasing self-knowledge; and developing competence in practices required for more central participation in the existent CoPs.

### *6.3.3 Critical experiences relating to exclusion and rejection*

As I have argued, communities are a significant part of NLAU’s social constitution, and since communities are defined not only by whom they include, but also by whom they

exclude, experiences of rejection constitute another kind of critical experience undergone by NLAU students. Represented in the data were experiences of exclusion from: the “junjapa” group; the majority student groups in study abroad destinations; the Bridge Program; and organisations of prospective employment. Similarly, although not relating to communities, termination of romantic relationships, were referenced as significant due to feelings of rejection. As in critical experiences relating to language, experiences of exclusion and rejection were seen to hold potential for increased knowledge of the social self, which in some cases was facilitated by sociological knowledge made egocentric. Increased self-knowledge enabled self-shaping (types 1 and 2).

In the SLI data, there were numerous references to experiences of rejection by all of the communities mentioned above and by romantic partners, and of the significance of these experiences to their identity trajectories. However, MN and CNA data, described in Chapter 4, provided a nuanced account of the processes involved in the reconciliation of conflicting identity trajectories resulting from exclusion from the junjapa group, in the case of Yuko and Wakako, and from majority student groups in study abroad destinations, in the case of Ayuka. Data in Chapters 4 and 5 describes the dynamic between the junjapa and non-junjapa groups and how Yuko and Wakako felt excluded from the junjapa group for not adhering to what they perceived as Japanese cultural norms – “ordered, strict and interdependent” (Yuko’s ICR figure 5.14). While Yuko’s migratory history prevented her from participating in the junjapa group, Wakako technically ‘qualified’ as a junjapa, having never lived abroad before entering NLAU. However, Wakako felt that, because she could no longer conform to Japanese cultural norms, she was excluded (described in subsection 4.6.2). Ayuka’s MN described her experiences of exclusion from the majority student group on her study abroad in Mississippi, as a result of cultural difference and, to some extent, from the broader community on the basis of her ethnicity and immigrant status (described in subsection 4.2.2). In all three cases, they were able to reconcile the ambivalence that this sense of exclusion caused with the help of increased knowledge of the contextual causes.

In their representations of these experiences in their MNs and CNAs, Yuko, Wakako and Ayuka provided cogent explanations for their exclusion, based on their reflection.

However, in the embodied immediacy of those experiences, they lacked the objective perspective that resulted from their later analysis and experienced them emotionally: Yuko pointed out in her CNA, “If we don't know what's going on, you still kind of feel sad, but you don't know why” (subsection 4.7.2). The way that they described the experiences, suggests a sense of ambivalence. ‘Ambivalence’ is often cited as an inevitable emotional condition in the process of negotiating identities (Bauman, 1991; Elliot, 1996; Papastergiadis, 2000; Simmel, 1950), and is defined by Block (2007: 21) as “the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart” and “the mutual conflicting feelings of love and hate [a]nd [...] the simultaneous affirmation and negation of such feelings” (p.22). The friends on whom Wakako relied for emotional support could be defined as junjapa (as could Wakako), yet she felt that she didn’t belong in the junjapa group. Many of Yuko’s close friends were technically junjapa, yet she described a degree of resentment towards junjapa students generally – “have fun in your small little world while I do more interesting things that you don't”, she directed at them (subsection 4.7.2). There was a degree of incoherence in Yuko and Wakako’s criticism of the junjapa group, resulting from their feelings of ambivalence. In addition, about her experiences on study abroad, Ayuka said in her MN (subsection 4.2.1):

“I had a lot of fun to experience American culture and talk with American students and other international students at school. I was able to make wonderful friends. On the other hand, I experienced being a foreigner, or a minority in the country, for the first time, and I felt that I was not included in American society.”

It was the condition of ambivalence, I argue, that prompted the kind of reflection and dialogue that resulted in increased self-knowledge and enabled self-shaping.

In all three cases, attempted reconciliation of their ambivalence involved the development of knowledge about the social dynamics of their context. Yuko and Wakako developed an understanding of the distinction between the junjapa and non-junjapa groups and the dynamics between them, through reflection and dialogue with others. For Ayuka, the development of knowledge of the social dynamics of the context of her study abroad destination was assisted by the sociology courses she took at her

host institution, in which she learned about issues of immigration, social exclusion and racism. On relating this knowledge of their social contexts to themselves – developing egocentric knowledge – they increased their knowledge of their social selves. For Yuko and Wakako, their egocentric knowledge enabled them to reify their identities as non-junapa, which enabled them to better express their individuality, and, in Ayuka’s case, it appeared that the sociological perspective she took of herself also changed her perspective on her hometown and her relationship with it, which led to the definition of a life plan, which informed many of her decisions afterwards.

#### *6.3.4 Critical experiences relating to exposure to different ways of life*

As documented in Chapter 5, the IGMs considered diversity to be one of NLAU’s defining characteristics: the diversity of the student body; the diversity that the students experience on their study abroad; and the diversity of learning opportunities. By engaging with this diversity, students encounter people who have lived lives and have values that differ from their own; and research activities, such as PBLs, and vocational activities, such as teaching practicums and internships, offer embodied experiences of different ways of living. Such diversity can lead to inspiring encounters, but also trials and tribulations. Either way, such encounters with diversity can constitute critical experiences in that they expand horizons of significance, and prompt strong evaluation.

The transformative effects of encounters with diverse others pervaded the data. As was illustrated in the dialogue quoted in Section 5A.5, as a result of meeting people with divergent ideas about their futures, Yamato was “liberated” from the prescribed life plan of attending an elite university and getting a job for life in a large corporation, which enabled him to imagine pursuing his interests at graduate school. In the same dialogue, Ayuka reflected that because of her engagement with NLAU’s small, relatively closed, yet diverse community she “realised that people are different... and [that] it’s OK to be different”, which had “broken her Japanese way of thinking”. This realisation enabled her to focus on what really interested her, she said. For Wakako, her encounters with people from other countries, on the one hand, enabled her to recognise the impact of Japanese cultural norms on her identity, and how they had stifled her during high school; and on the other hand, the particular friends she had made inspired her to

transgress and express her individuality: she said of her LGBTQ friends in the US during the CNA, “so they’re doing like their stuff, so maybe I can do it my own way, too” (subsection 4.6.2). Inevitably, being confronted with values that are opposed to one’s own causes ambivalence, which can be painful. One of the SLEI interviewees (Gr1SLEI-12) was a Christian and found that her values conflicted with many of the people in NLAU that she met, and she had found it hard to accept the way they thought. However, the small and isolated community at NLAU meant that students (and faculty) form close relationships with each other and, as a member of a minority religion, this student was forced to try to see their perspective and endeavour to understand and accept them. She found this a “really deep” experience, which impelled her to cultivate an acceptance of diversity. This enabled her to make close relationships with friends and roommates, with whom she was able to discuss topics that were fundamental to her values, which prompted her to reflect on her personality and to define what was really important to her. These instances exemplified how being presented with alternative perspectives on the world and different ways of being, enables students to see and think beyond the culturally conditioned aspects of their selves.

In the data, there were also instances of transformation that resulted from the opportunities afforded by the NLAU context to experience other ways of life (described in Section 4.3). Arisa was inspired by the places that her NLAU life took her to. First was her move to rural Akita from intensely urban Yokohama, in which she developed a strong affinity with the rural way of life. She connected with this through community projects and participation in the historical Kanto festival with the NLAU team. Then in Norway, on her study abroad, she observed the relative equality that was afforded by the local culture and the Norwegian welfare system, and also the apparent sustainability of the Norwegian infrastructure. These experiences extended her horizons of significance, prompting strong evaluation and ultimately influenced the definition of a life plan, which informed significant choices thereafter, such as the decision to pursue a graduate education in rural sustainability. As in other critical experiences, those relating to experiencing other ways of life are not always so smooth. Among Yuko and Wakako’s SLEI interviewees were some who had suffered negative experiences on their internships, one in an ITC company (Gr2SLEI Phase 1-I22) and another on a teaching practicum (Gr2SLEI Phase 1 -I6). In both cases, the experiences resulted in the rejection



of associated career paths, reifying their non-participation in the associated communities.

Critical experiences relating to exposure to other ways of life make most salient a condition for autonomy that underlies all the critical experiences: an awareness of our horizons of significance. In the encounters with diversity described above, the horizons of significance of the students were extended, prompting strong evaluation, which can lead to self-shaping.

### *6.3.5 Critical experiences relating to economic realities*

Most NLAU students, as is the case for university students in general, are for the first time in their lives responsible for managing their own finances (to varying degrees). Due to the diversity of the students' backgrounds, there is a wide disparity in the resources available to each student. At one end of the spectrum, there are students who park their luxury cars outside their dormitory and freely use credit cards paid for by their parents, as Yuko said during her CNA (subsection 4.7.1); and at the other end there are those forced to make great sacrifices in order to maintain payment of tuition fees, as in one of Akari's SLEI interviewees (Gr1SLEI I4). Economic realities play a significant role in the lives of some students, and their specific circumstances and the way they respond to them hold implications for their autonomy: increased knowledge of their social selves and greater self-direction in the form of financial independence.

Relative wealth can shape the social lives of students. Wakako, coming from a single parent family of limited means, felt there were activities from which she was excluded. Although she felt that this did not limit her social life, it limited the kinds of things she could do with some of her friends, thereby shaping her social life, to some extent (FN16). The data also suggested that relative economic deprivation can lead to envy and feelings of inferiority. Akari, for instance, as described in subsection 4.5.2, said that she struggled with feelings of resentment towards students who had had opportunities to live abroad, due to family circumstances: she "simply env[ied] them", she said. Yuko also felt envy but, in addition, noticing her relative economic deprivation also triggered a sense of inferiority (as described in subsection 4.7.1). During the CNA, she said "I really

don't feel inferior to others, but you know, my envy and inferiority always comes with the idea of money". Reflecting on this emotional reaction, during the CNA, led her to attribute her lack of self-esteem to injustice relating to money in her family life, as a child. "Why is it always me that's always like trying so hard when he gets it for free?", she said of her brother during the CNA.

As these examples show, students' financial circumstances can cause both practical and emotional challenges. However, by recognising these issues and their causes, they gain knowledge of their social self - as in the case of Wakako who understood her socioeconomic situation and its implications - or their relational self, like Yuko who was prompted to identify money as a key area of injustice in her family relationships. In other cases, in dealing with these issues, students took varying degrees of control over their finances. Yuko was just one example of many students who succeeded in getting scholarships, and working part-time jobs is part of many NLAU students' lives; the IGMs and many of the SLEI interviewees had them and some had achieved a high degree of financial independence (Gr1SLEI I5, for instance, had his own stock trading company). Such actions demonstrate the agency required for self-direction and self-shaping and I might argue that autonomy within the economic system is a prerequisite to more 'identity-oriented' kinds of autonomy.

### *6.3.6 Section conclusion - emotions, values, self-knowledge and discourse in control over learning*

In this section, I have argued that by engaging with the demanding and heterogeneous NLAU environment, students undergo critical experiences relating to language and adapting to a new pedagogical environment, experiences of exclusion and rejection, exposure to other ways of life, and economic realities. These critical experiences are the result of an expansion of the students' horizons of significance, and the need to reconcile the associated ambivalence can prompt strong evaluation, which enables self-shaping (types 1 and 2), thereby enabling the students to take control over their identities (learner autonomy, as I have defined it). Despite the risks and the hardships endured during these experiences, there was a consensus among the IMGs and some of

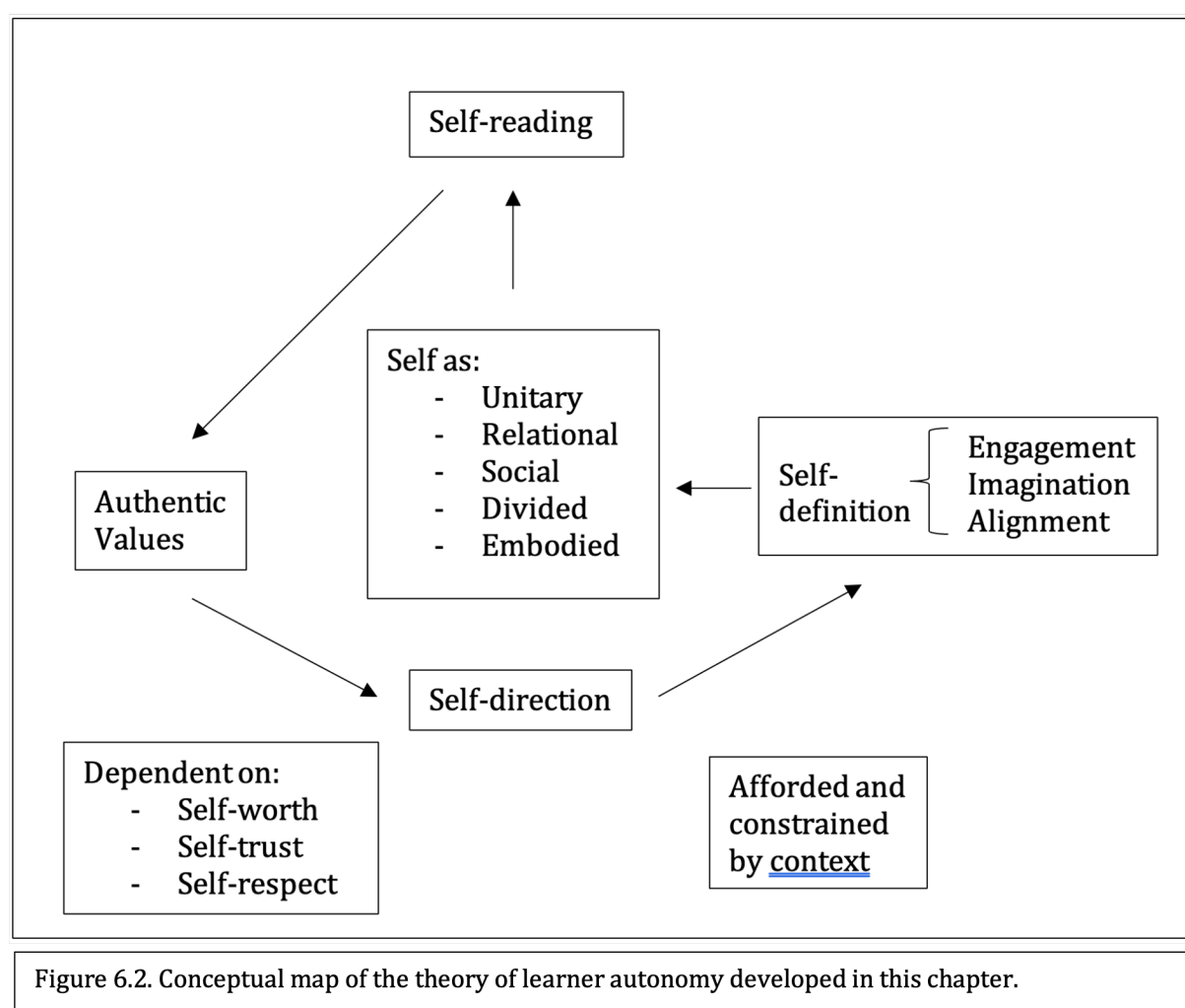
their SLEI interviewees that their time at NLAU was meaningful as a result of them. This notion echoes Block's (2002: 10) work on critical experiences and cosmopolitan identities: one of his participants said of her experiences of migrating every five years:

"I always thought of my experience as a positive thing. So, ... I mean it was hectic in the sense that you always kind of had to catch up with something. But I think ... yeah, it was overall, looking back on it, it was a very enriching experience. ... I wouldn't have minded my kids going through the same thing. (MM-11/6/02)"

Returning the discussion to the research questions, in this section, I addressed the question of how they took control over their learning/identity construction, in the context of NLAU. The analysis of the critical experiences above makes salient the roles of 'emotions', 'values', 'self-knowledge' and '(d)iscourse' in learner autonomy. In the section conclusion, here, I detail how these interact in enabling control in learning. Then I relate these conclusions to other learner autonomy research.

Although Taylor's (1985a) concept of strong evaluation has, thus far, sufficed to describe this process of making choices in relation to values and horizons of significance, I argue that a theory that can more accurately account for the processes that underlie it is now needed. Here, I evoke Meyers' (1987) 'autonomy competencies', which include 'self-reading', 'self-definition' and 'self-direction' which interact in the service of Taylor's (1985a) strong evaluation. Self-reading involves being receptive to cues from all five facets of the self – 'as unitary', 'as social', 'as relational', 'as divided' and 'as embodied' (first described in section 2.4) – to develop self-knowledge which can inform self-definition and self-direction. Self-definition may involve reconfiguring or accepting aspects of the self, revealed through self-reading, and is constituted in the expression of one's values, either in language or in action. Self-direction refers to the 'resolve' involved in acting on the basis of our values and 'resistance' to pressure to act contrary to them (Meyers 1989), making it necessary for successful self-definition. In terms of the relationship between these autonomy competencies and the three modes of belonging, through which I argued that we construct our identities in the previous section, self-definition could be considered analogous to identity construction (through engagement, imagination and alignment), and could be considered

autonomous if based on *authentic values* resulting from self-reading, which might require self-direction (resistance or resolve in the face of pressure choose or act otherwise). The conceptual map, shown in figure 6.2 illustrates the relationship between the conceptual components of the theory of learner autonomy developed here, including those utilised in the previous section on identity construction; in addition to the emotional conditions of self-worth, self-trust and self-respect, upon which the exercise of the autonomy competencies rest, and the way that all of these components are contingent on contextual affordances and constraints. Evident in this model is the dynamic nature of the self and the iterative nature of learner autonomy.



In terms of Meyers' (1987) autonomy competencies, the result of many of the critical experiences described above was students' self-discovery, as a result of self-reading, which enabled autonomous choices that resulted in self-definition and self-direction. In many cases the primary outcome was the discovery of the self as social, which could be

seen as the interaction between the self as unitary and the social self, in that their sociohistorical constitution, and the resulting values and capacities, were brought to the attention of the students. Such self-knowledge enabled them to make choices in defining and directing themselves. Self-definition was manifested in the accounts above in the participants' (d)iscourse about themselves that reified identities of participation and non-participation in relation to social configurations on multiple scales, as described in section 6.2. When the participants *resolved* to follow life plans (like Ayuka's work to help immigrants in her hometown, described in subsection 4.2.3) or *resisted* peer pressure in order to transgress norms (like Wakako's wilful rejection of Japanese cultural norms, described in subsection 4.6.2), they were self-directing: they were acting on the basis of *values* that they had chosen.

Perhaps this much is merely a translation of strong evaluation in new terms. However, while Taylor (1991) focused exclusively on the reading of the social self (the self's relationship with 'horizons of significance', in his terms) as the source of values, I argue that underlying the discovery of the social self was the reading of other facets of the self. For instance, to recognise the ambivalence caused by conflicting identity trajectories described in the accounts of critical experiences above, the participants had to be sensitive to its bodily manifestations (the visceral and emotional responses): they read their embodied selves. There were numerous references to emotional states in the accounts above: Yamato speaks of excitement and fear on entering NLAU (subsection 4.4.1); Akari laments the suffering she endured in her efforts to attain the necessary TOEFL score (subsection 4.5.1); and Yuko describes the feelings of envy and inferiority she experiences resulting from salient economic inequality (subsection 4.7.1). Being attuned to the visceral and affective responses to experiences plants the seeds of the agency required for other kinds of self-reading, self-definition and self-direction, giving *emotions* a central role in learner autonomy.

Also underpinning learner autonomy is reading the relational self. The self as relational is the medium by which we experience and develop the social self (or access our horizons of significance), as it is constituted in our direct interpersonal relationships and, thus, the (d)iscourse through which we define ourselves. The accounts in this section also highlighted the interaction between the relational self and the embodied

self. For instance, by comparing themselves to other individuals around them, NLAU students often considered themselves inferior, and Wakako's treatment by 'junjapa' (6.3.3) students alerted her to aspects of her social context. The relational self can be a source of visceral and affective cues manifesting in the embodied self, which prompt self-reading. Reading of the divided self was less pervasive in the data, but it played a central role in Yuko's discovery of her social self, as was evidenced in the revelations she experienced through drawing her MN and participating in the CNA; attributing her lack of self-esteem to injustice relating to money in her family life, as a child, was one example.

This account of learner autonomy, that emphasises self-reading, self-definition and self-direction, draws attention to the role of emotion and (d)iscourse in developing self-knowledge that enables individuals to choose and act on the basis of authentic values, which, I argue, addresses deficiencies in earlier socioculturally oriented learner autonomy research identified in subsection 6.2.3; that it did not account for the authenticity of the values that inform action.

I argue that the way in which I have addressed this issue has not previously been done in the field of learner autonomy. The issue of the authenticity of the desires or values that guide agency, the attention to which I argue is lacking from sociocultural perspectives on learner autonomy, is a question of personal autonomy. Although I argue no studies of learner autonomy have drawn on theories of personal autonomy to the extent of this inquiry, as I pointed out in section 2.4, others have pointed to the necessary relationship between the two (Jiménez Raya et al., 2007, 2017, for instance), and/or criticised the field for implicitly relying on liberal conceptions of autonomy that overemphasise rationality and ignore the social constitution of the individual (Lantolf, 2013; Pennycook, 1997). They, however, did not develop a coherent alternative. Zembylas and Lamb (2008) outlined the issues relating to autonomy as an educational goal from the perspective of liberal, communitarian and post-modern philosophies, but they do not discuss the implications of these for the field of learner autonomy. Benson (2013) borrowed the concepts of 'authenticity', 'flexible control' and 'coherence' from educational philosophy in an attempt to reconcile individual agency with interdependence in learner autonomy. These hint at a coherent theory of learner

autonomy that takes account of the sociohistorical nature of individuals, but he does not, in my view, adequately explain it. I argue that none of the above provide a complete theory of learner autonomy. Once we take a sociocultural perspective of learning, an account of the relationships between emotions, self-knowledge, values and discourse in the making of choices, as I have elaborated here, is required for a coherent account of control in learning (and in life).

There has been research on the relationship between emotions and learner autonomy. O'Leary (2017), for instance, emphasised the importance of 'meta affect' in learner autonomy and examined the 'emotional intelligence' of learners, which, in addition to "lowering their anxiety" and "empathising with others", involved "taking their emotional temperature" (p.32). This last component of emotional intelligence could be considered a type of self-reading, but the role attributed to this in O'Leary's (2017) conception of learner autonomy seems to be the increased learning efficacy that it affords, rather than increasing the autonomy of the learner. This research may also implicitly rest on rationalist assumptions that emotions are an obstacle to autonomy that must be brought under the control of rationality, which runs counter to the definition of autonomy in this thesis. White and Bown (2017) acknowledge the integral place of emotion in mediating the construction of meaning and thus space, place and learning opportunities, drawing on post-structural understandings of emotions as existing in relationships between the psychology of individuals and their contexts. This, in my view, offers a promising framework for exploring the role of emotion in autonomy, but the focus of their study, as with O'Leary's (2017), was on learning rather than autonomy. As a result, they do not inquire into the relationship between emotion, knowledge and values and the role they play in *control* over learning.

There has been research on the role of metacognitive knowledge in learner autonomy (Lamb, 2001; Oxford, 2003; Wenden, 1998; Zhang, 2016), which is related in some regards to the self-knowledge that is central to the conclusions of this inquiry. The focus, however, is limited to the cognitivist perspective on learning – constructing knowledge, rather than constructing identity, ignoring the authenticity of motives and, thus, the autonomy of the learner. Foundational to much of the work on metacognitive knowledge is Flavell's (1976) taxonomy of 'person knowledge', 'task knowledge' and

‘strategic knowledge’. Person knowledge may seem to be synonymous with self-knowledge (as it is conceived in this study), but the scope tends to be limited to “human factors that facilitate or inhibit learning [as traditionally conceived]” (Wenden, 1998: 518). Lamb (2001) referred to the role of reflection and dialogue on learning styles in motivating learners; learning styles could be classified as a type of value and the result of such reflection is an increase in self-knowledge, but his focus remained on the classroom. Zhang (2016) takes an explicitly sociocultural perspective on metacognitive knowledge, acknowledging its dynamic and relational nature, but still limits its focus to “learning tasks” and becoming “strategic learners” (p151). No doubt, learning tasks are a part of the process of identity formation and strategic competence may enhance agency in this process, but without attention paid to values, we cannot account for the authenticity of learners’ motives and cannot, therefore, account for their autonomy.

As I have argued, authentic values are the basis for the control in learner autonomy: the extent to which our choices cohere with our values and our values are informed by self-knowledge are the extent to which we are autonomous. Writing from a critical perspective, some have posited the necessity of *specific* values for learner autonomy - Jiménez Raya et al.’s (2007:1) being “socially responsible” and striving for “social transformation”, for instance, but I have found no learner autonomy research that discusses the role of values *in general* in the process of learner autonomy. I argue that without consideration of values in terms of their relationship with our choices we do not have a coherent account of learner autonomy. I propose that the conception of autonomy outlined above achieves this. Finally, considering previous work in the field on discourse (used in its generic sense here), it has been at the centre of discussion about learner autonomy since it was conceived (Holec, 1980; Little, 2004; Van Lier, 2004). However, the important role that (d)iscourse plays in the development of our values has, thus far, been neglected.

In sum, by examining the critical experiences of NLAU students, I argue that learner autonomy is the capacity to exercise control in the construction of one’s identity, through the reading of the self as unitary, as relational, as social, as divided and as embodied, enabling self-definition through self-direction. Central to this theory of learner autonomy are the values of individuals, the principles by which one feels one



ought to live, which are the object of self-reading and the basis of self-definition and self-direction. This, I argue is a significant contribution to learner autonomy research because it addresses the problem, in sociocultural conceptions, of how individuals exercise control in relation to their sociohistorical constitution. What has been implied but is yet to be explicitly addressed is how this process is afforded and constrained by the context (the third secondary research question), which is the focus of the next section.

## 6.4 Situated learner autonomy: affordances and constraints in the NLAU context

Discussions in sections 6.2 and 6.3 have detailed dynamics that are afforded and constrained by the embodied and sociohistorical nature of the self, in relation to a particular place: NLAU. Those sections examined learner autonomy from the perspective of the individual: how learner autonomy was manifested in the experiences of NLAU students, in relation to their contexts. In doing so, I addressed the first two secondary research questions – how NLAU students construct their identities in relation to their sociocultural, physical and historical contexts and how they exercise control in this process, which goes some way to addressing the primary research question of how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of NLAU. Addressing the remaining secondary research question, of how learner autonomy is afforded and constrained, is the objective of this section, and builds upon the conclusions of the inquiry group, outlined in section 5A.15, by interpreting them from the perspective of literature relating to place, organisation and learner autonomy.

The theories used so far, SLT and those of personal autonomy, I argue, have accounted well for the social dynamics involved, but they have left the role of NLAU as an institution and as a place in the background. However, it is particularities of specific places that afford and constrain the social and, therefore, psychological processes involved in learner autonomy, pointing to the need of a theory of place, with which to reinterpret the data. With this in mind, I conceptualise NLAU as a place and an organisation from a processual perspective before discussing the data in terms of

affordances and constraints relating to local-global relationships, to dynamics internal to the NLAU context and to the organisational aspects of NLAU as an institution. Elements of the NLAU context that were found to afford and/or constrain the learner autonomy of its students are: the heterogeneity of the student body; the English medium environment; opportunities for friendships; opportunities for knowledge development; an ethos of autonomy; and support for participation in CoPs. Discussed in terms of affordances and constraints, situated learner autonomy has implications for learner autonomy on a collective level, highlighting the inherently political nature of learner autonomy, which is also discussed.

#### *6.4.1 NLAU as an organised place*

I conceive NLAU as a place and an organisation. Lamb and Vodicka (2017), in their study on multilingual communities, mentioned in section 2.3, utilised human geographer Massey's (2005) conception of place as 'relational', 'mutually constituted locally and globally', 'dynamic', 'internally heterogeneous', 'open and unfinished', and 'unique'. Considering the way that NLAU has been represented in the data and my ontological position described in section 3.2.1, this theory is also apt to examine the way that NLAU as a place and as an organisation affords and constrains the autonomy of its students.

Although Massey (2005) questions the strength of the distinction between the two, human geographers define a *place* as a *space* made meaningful by those who engage in action within it (Tuan, 1977). This emphasises the social constitution of places. This means for Massey (2005) that places are inherently relational. Indeed, the trajectories of the students, represented in the data, involved continuous interactions with other people, with the curriculum and other non-human aspects of their context, including the space. This suggests that through the same processes by which students construct their identities, through engagement, imagination and alignment, NLAU is made a place. Also consistent with Massey (1997, 2005), these interrelations occur both within and between places, which exist on different geographical scales; references to social configurations across space and time were frequent in the data, from particular places within NLAU, such as the library, to the local area of Akita, to the nation of Japan.

This relationality means that places are dynamic. Clearly represented in the data was the coming together of the trajectories of individuals and non-human trajectories, such as ideologies, economic forces and educational policies, in a particular time and space; Massey (2005: 140) refers to this as the “throwntogetherness of place”. Places, for these reasons, are inherently unstable and, constituted as they are by a multiplicity of trajectories, internally heterogeneous - the diversity of perspectives frequently referenced in the data is testament to this. This suggests there are different ideas about the identity of the place and how to participate in its on-going construction and reconstruction. While it is possible to regulate the kinds of interaction that occur, conflict is inevitable and requires constant negotiation. Massey (2005) argues that this negotiation of multiplicity lies at the heart of the ongoing construction and reconstruction of place and is reciprocally related to the identity construction of the people involved. This suggests that by the same processes through which students construct their identities, NLAU’s identity as a place is constructed. The inherent relationality and dynamicity of places means that they are “always unfinished and open” (Massey, 2005: 111) and, because of this, “there can be no assumption of pre-given coherence” (Massey, 2005: 140). Identities of places are always open to negotiation, even in the face of hegemonic or institutional discourses that attempt to fix them. Finally, places are unique, not because of internal factors, but because of their relations with other places: it is the way that trajectories, coming in from the outside, intersect in space and time that make places unique.

All of this applies to NLAU, but it ignores its institutional elements. As a university, deliberate attempts have been made to define it and to regulate the kinds of interactions that occur within it, with the explicit purpose of providing a public good – education. It is this purpose, as it is expressed in the texts describing its educational mission (described in section 1.7) and its demonstrable success in achieving it, that attracts around 200 new degree-seeking students and around 180 exchange students every year (pre-COVID-19). Several scholars of Organisational Studies have drawn on Massey’s concept of place in accounting for the inherently processual nature of organisations (for example, Vásquez and Cooren, 2013). They acknowledge the relationality of place and all that is implied by this (expounded above), but they focus on how organisations

attempt to order places, to align the multiplicity of trajectories that intersect in a particular space and time, unifying and delimiting the way the place is practiced (Sergot and Saives, 2016). Functioning organisations are enacted through communication – conversations connected by non-human entities, such as policy documents and building design – resulting in “the ordered distribution of actors, actions and responsibilities” (Vásquez and Cooren, 2013: 42). However, in line with Massey’s (2005: 141) assertion that “there can be no assumption of pre-given coherence”, any order achieved by an organisation is ever contingent on negotiation, leaving space for contestation and reinterpretation; the heterogeneity in NLAU evidenced in the data validates this. Therefore, even with attempts at organisation, heterogeneity and dynamicity are inherent to place.

With this conception of NLAU in mind and in reference to the data, I discuss the ways that NLAU afforded and constrained the learner autonomy of its students.

#### *6.4.2 Heterogeneity of the student body*

The heterogeneity of the student body afforded the learner autonomy of NLAU students because it underlaid all the critical experiences described above in that they were all a result of students comparing themselves to others who were different to them. This amounted to the extension of horizons of significance that caused feelings of ambivalence that prompted self-reading, self-definition and self-direction. As Massey argues, some degree of heterogeneity is inherent to places, due to their interrelation with other places, as referred to earlier. This is particularly salient in NLAU because this natural quality has been exaggerated by the way it has been organised. As in most places, each member of the community (that enacts the place) is on a trajectory that began elsewhere, and the diversity-oriented admissions policy, the exchange program and the international hiring program for faculty (which are themselves a result of globalised trajectories of global economic integration) maximise the heterogeneity of the community. Then, compounding the impact of this heterogeneity on the students is the relatively small and isolated nature of the campus, which means students tend to rely on each other for social interaction, and the dormitory policies that include mandatory campus residence for first-years, room sharing and pairing degree-seeking

students with exchange students where possible. In terms of constraints on learner autonomy associated with the heterogeneity of the student body, there is a possibility that the sense of inferiority that some students experience when they compare themselves to others from heterogeneous backgrounds would undermine their self-trust, self-worth and self-respect, the emotional foundations of learner autonomy.

### *6.4.3 English medium environment*

The English medium academic and (to some degree) social environment of NLAU and the heterogeneous levels of competence among the students mean that English has become perhaps the main 'measuring stick' by which students compare themselves to each other. For many students, prior to entering NLAU, English had been their strongest subject in school and, therefore, a point of pride and an important part of their identity, which was disrupted when they entered NLAU. In the most cases described above this ultimately had positive autonomy-related outcomes because it prompted self-discovery, self-definition and self-direction – it afforded autonomy. The English medium environment, however, can also be a constraint on the learner autonomy of students; directly if a student does not want to speak English (as in cases mentioned from my own experience as a teacher at NLAU) and indirectly because feelings of inferiority can erode the self-trust, self-worth and self-respect necessary for the exercise of autonomy competencies.

Viewed from the perspective of NLAU as an organised place, the English medium environment is a direct result of NLAU policies: the English medium curriculum; the hiring of international, English-speaking faculty and administrative staff; the exchange program; and the admissions policy that prioritises English competence. These policies are enacted through the (d)iscourse and the behaviour of members of the NLAU community. These policies, however, result from trajectories that cross space and time. There are national educational policies and associated grants that promote English education in Japan, which are a result of an awareness of the global trajectory of an increasingly integrated global capitalist society. Then, placing this within global historical trajectories, that English is the global language, we can attribute to Britain's colonial legacy, through the imposition of English as the lingua franca in their

dominions, and more recent US imperialism, manifested in their domination of popular culture throughout the world.

#### *6.4.4 Opportunities for friendships*

Friendships were a theme that pervaded the data, as the site where discourse identities were constructed as well as the object of discourse identity work, but I argue that the primary way in which they afforded learner autonomy was by providing the necessary emotional support to maintain self-worth and enabling open, value-oriented (d)iscourse that enabled self-reading and self-definition, which can lead to self-direction. However, the intimate nature of friendships that affords those autonomy enhancing processes can also undermine them, constraining autonomy: friendships can be oppressive. This was demonstrated in subsection 4.7.2, in Yuko's friendships with junjapa students, who had made her feel "kind of sad", before she was able to attribute it to the junjapa/non-junjapa dynamic.

Friendships are a common feature of places, but the nature of NLAU as a place shapes the friendships within. The small size and isolated location of the campus, as I mentioned above, means that students tend to rely on each other for social interaction, leading to close friendships. The way that NLAU is organised intensifies this feature. Small class sizes and the dormitory policies of shared rooms and mandatory campus residence for first years afford close friendships; and the EAP program forms class groups in which they initially take all their classes together and streams students according to level, which means they are grouped with people who share similar language difficulties, leading to relationships of solidarity.

#### *6.4.5 Opportunities for knowledge development*

Knowledge of the self plays a central role in the conception of learner autonomy that I have developed in this thesis, but what I would like to emphasise here is that development of knowledge of the world beyond us plays an important role in the development of self-knowledge. Sociological knowledge made egocentric helped some

students to develop knowledge of the social self, as represented in the data, but we can infer that other forms of allocentric knowledge could be made egocentric, leading to deeper knowledge of all facets of the self, provided that this knowledge is related to the self. Some, however, would argue that some modes of facilitating the development of knowledge can be oppressive. For instance, what Freire (1970: 53) terms “banking education”, in which the teacher is deemed to deposit static knowledge into the minds of students, is considered by critical pedagogues to be a form of oppression that “prescribes” (Freire, 1970: 29) the way that people think and behave. This perspective was evidenced Yuko’s MN presented and described in section 4.7, which indicated that she occasionally felt “brainwashed” by NLAU’s education.

The knowledge that the students develop helps them to imagine the world beyond the here and now, and the materials and the teachers that provide these opportunities for knowledge development come from all over the world, highlighting the interconnectedness of NLAU as a place. And, at the risk of stating the obvious, as a university much of NLAU’s organisational efforts are designed to align the activities of the people within it to develop knowledge in its students, through the curriculum and the hiring of teachers. The extent to which students are encouraged to make the knowledge egocentric, presumably varies among teachers, but the institutional discourse suggests that this is part of the university’s organisational agenda, which is the object of the next sub-section.

#### *6.4.6 An ethos of autonomy*

As I argued in section 1.7, NLAU is an explicitly autonomy-oriented university: self-realisation is a stated goal in the mission statement (figure 1.3); self-questioning is posited as the route to self-realisation in the presidents’ message (referenced in section 1.7); “understanding of one’s cultural and self-identity” and “autonomous thought” are stated as educational goals (figure 1.4). This institutional discourse may inform students’ decisions to enter NLAU and to at least some degree it aligns the activities of the participants within NLAU; certainly, it is a central component in the orientation of new students, and it informs the activities of the Active Learning Support Centre (ALSC). There were also echoes of this throughout the data. I argue that this institutional

discourse that promotes an ethos of autonomy encourages in the students, to varying degrees, self-reading, self-definition and self-direction, thereby affording autonomy. However, an argument could be made that such discourse could be hegemonic and, considering that it may contrast with most other contexts in Japan, it may lead to inauthentic thinking and behaviour, constituting a potential constraint on students' autonomy. From the perspective of the data presented in this thesis, however, I would reject such claims, since the capacities that develop, in part as a result of this autonomy ethos, do not preclude the embracing of Japanese cultural norms, neither do they necessitate embracing the values implicit in NLAU's institutional framework; in fact, as I have argued exhaustively, critical awareness of one's emplaced self is a central component to one's learner autonomy.

As with the English medium context, the autonomy ethos is a result of trajectories that cross space and time. Although public debate on the value of individual autonomy has been ongoing in Japanese politics and educational policy for more than 150 years, its roots can be traced to the West (as I argued in section 1.6). Similarly, the concept of 'liberal arts' has roots in Western antiquity.

#### *6.4.7 Opportunities to experience other ways of life*

In a similar way to the heterogeneity of the student body, the provision of opportunities for students to experience different ways of life - such as PBL projects, internships, teaching practicums and study abroad - extends the students' horizons of significance, causing ambivalence, which can prompt strong evaluation, and afford learner autonomy. These same experiences, however, also hold the potential to constrain students' autonomy. Students who embark on internships, for instance, are put in the hands of people who do not necessarily have the educational interests of the students in mind, leading to exploitative relationships and oppressive socialisation (as in Gr2SLEI phase 1 I14), which can undermine the emotional conditions on which the exercise of the autonomy competencies rely. As with the heterogeneity of the student body, NLAU's organisational efforts exaggerate the heterogeneity that is inherent to places, in this case through programs, such as PBL programs, internships, teaching practicums and



study abroad, which add further identity trajectories by making further connections to places across space and time.

#### *6.4.8 Support in participating in CoPs*

Finally, participation in CoPs was a primary way in which NLAU students constructed their identities, first peripherally and progressively more centrally. Participation in desirable CoPs is contingent on competence in the associated practices, so assistance in developing the necessary competences can enable students to be more agentic in the construction of their identities. In contrast, the absence of such support could prevent participation on those CoPs, thereby constraining their autonomy. In the case of NLAU's clubs and circles, this is likely to be a peer-to-peer process, and this is facilitated by the institutional framework that sanctions the clubs and circles, meaning, in principle at least, any students may join any club they like and be assisted by more central participants in developing the necessary competence in the practices of the CoP. One practice that is fundamental to central participation in the NLAU student community is English communication, the development of which is supported by the curriculum, facilities such as the LDIC and the ALC, and teachers.

#### *6.4.9 Collective autonomy*

In this section, I have emphasised the contingency of the learner autonomy of NLAU students on the NLAU context, which is organised in a particular way to achieve specified educational goals. This highlights the inherently political nature of learner autonomy and education more generally. Taking this political perspective on learner autonomy, we must extend the principles of self-reading, self-definition and self-direction to the collective. As Castoriadis (1991) points out, just as personal autonomy is dependent on self-knowledge, a collective's autonomy is dependent on its knowledge of its constitution and the processes that make it as it is; and, just as an individual is autonomous when they take control over their identity, a collective is autonomous when its members are knowingly engaged in its creation and recreation. Without this, individuals are shaped by forces of which they have no knowledge or control, meaning

their autonomy is undermined. Considering this, as Yuko pointed out, the awareness that the IGMs gained of these autonomy related processes in NLAU, amounts to a higher level of learner autonomy, particularly if we consider the enactment of their research into NLAU policy. This speaks of the value of projects such as this inquiry for enhancing the autonomy of the student participants.

#### *6.4.10 Section conclusion – affordances and constraints inherent to the embodied, sociohistorical and emplaced self*

The embodied and sociohistorical self moves across space and time but is at all points in time in and part of a particular place. Each place, as the point at which human and non-human trajectories collide (Massey, 2005), is dynamic and relational, thus affording and constraining learner autonomy in unique ways. The extent to which a place affords or constrains autonomy depends on the kinds of experiences it provides, and the extent to which those experiences afford or constrain self-reading, self-definition and self-direction. We can conclude that NLAU is a place that has been organised so as to exaggerate its “throwntogetherness” (Massey, 2005: 149) in a way that affords and constrains the learner autonomy of its students. NLAU’s internal heterogeneity and interconnectedness with other places are extreme, due to the institutional framework, and are responsible for a highly dynamic and open environment that challenges students in unusual ways, which can prompt self-reading, self-definition and self-direction.

The challenges caused by the heterogeneity of the student body and the English medium environment; and the opportunities to experience other ways of life were found to afford the objective perspective described by the IGMs in section 5B.2, bringing about an awareness of what I defined in that section as their ‘emplaced self’ (constituted in the interplay between their embodied, relational and social selves in relation to a specific place). Opportunities to develop knowledge of the world and the autonomy ethos appeared to assist students in developing egocentric knowledge that potentially assists in increasing awareness of all facets of the self, including the emplaced self. Again, the role of emotions in mediating learner autonomy must be stressed: ambivalence, caused

by challenges, prompts the kind of self-reading that results in the aforementioned objective perspective. Furthermore, the exercise of self-reading, self-definition and self-direction rest on the emotional foundations of self-worth, self-trust and self-respect, which are contingent on healthy interpersonal relationships, such as friendships and, to some extent, support in participating in CoPs. Finally, although the exercise of these skills may, to some extent, be possible through introspection and solitary action, a major factor is the extent to which the place affords (d)iscourse that provides access to horizons of significance and facilitates self-reading, self-definition and, therefore, self-direction.

We can conclude then that affordances and constraints on learner autonomy are inherent to the embodied, sociohistorical and emplaced self. Thus, from an educational perspective, the way a place is organised can have a profound impact on the learner autonomy of individuals who are in and a part of that place, which highlights the political dimension of educational organisation: choices made by those with power in educational institutions, whether wittingly or not, can either liberate or oppress students in the construction of their identities. This points to the mutual relationship between the autonomy of the individual and of the collective.

Interpreting the data from the perspective of place contributes to the relatively new area of research focusing on learner autonomy in relation to space and place, first discussed in section 2.3. A number of studies have examined place as an agent in learner autonomy (many of which are included in Murray and Lamb's (2018) volume, "Space, place and autonomy in language learning"). However, in most cases, just as I argued in subsection 6.2.3 in relation to research on learner autonomy from a sociocultural perspective, the focus of most of this research is on learning rather than autonomy: examining learning practices rather than the autonomy of the choices that underly them and the affording and constraining role of place. One exception is Lamb and Vodicka's (2017) inquiry into the ways that the collective autonomy of minority language communities is afforded and constrained in an urban space, but I believe the research presented in this thesis is the first to focus on the ways that an educational institution affords and constrains the learner autonomy of individuals within it. Nor do I believe, has there been research that examines the role of the policy framework at the level of

the university in affording and constraining the learner autonomy of its students. While there has been research on the role of contexts on the level of classrooms (Kocatepe, 2017), institutional facilities (Hobbs and Dofs, 2017; Murray et al., 2014, 2017) and informal learning spaces (Balçıkanlı, 2017), none have taken into consideration the impact of the fundamental organisational structure of the university, including admissions and accommodation policies, as this study has.

Focusing on the affording and constraining effects of the organisation of places on *autonomy* in learning, makes this a rare empirical contribution to research on learner autonomy from a political/critical perspective, which I outlined in section 2.5. Pennycook's (1997) critique that the field had been de-radicalised prompted a number of scholars to conceptualise learner autonomy in more political or social terms (as I documented in section 2.5), but empirical research on these aspects of learner autonomy is relatively scarce. As noted in subsection 6.2.3, sociocultural research on learner autonomy examines the way that learning is constrained and afforded by context but pays little attention to affordances and constraints on the capacities involved in the autonomy of that learning. Pennycook (1997) suggested the field should look to radical educators such as Freire for a more political perspective on learner autonomy and, indeed, the discovery of the social and the emplaced self that is central to the concept of learner autonomy that I have developed here bears close resemblance to Freire's (1970) 'conscientization' – the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through action and reflection. What section 6.3 and this section describe is how this process can occur as a result of the characteristics of place and can be manipulated to some extent through organisation.

This section has described the ways in which the NLAU context afforded and constrained the learner autonomy of its students, pointing to the role played by place in mediating the emotions and (d)iscourse on which the skills of self-reading, self-definition and self-direction rest. The impact of the organisation of place on these processes were also highlighted. As such, this interpretation of the data contributes to research on learner autonomy in relation to place and to research on learner autonomy from a political/critical perspective.

## 6.5 Conclusions

This chapter built upon the conclusions of Chapters 4 and 5 through synthesis with literature from the fields of learner autonomy, personal autonomy, identity, space and place, and organisational studies (some of which had already been discussed in earlier chapters and some was introduced for the first time), in order to develop a coherent theory of learner autonomy that is grounded in the experiences of NLAU students, through the rigorous inquiry of the IGMs. In explicating this theory, I was able to situate it within the field of learner autonomy. In this section, I summarise how the chapter has addressed the primary research question of how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of NLAU by reviewing conclusions on the secondary research questions of how NLAU students construct their identities in relation to their sociocultural, physical, and historical contexts, how they exercise control over these processes and what are the affordances and constraints. Then, I abstract these findings further to define learner autonomy in new terms and summarise how this contributes to the field of learner autonomy.

Through synthesis of the conclusions of the inquiry group, my own interpretations of data on the trajectories of NLAU students and SLT (Lave and Wenger, 1991), I conceived learning as identity construction. Interpreted in terms of Wenger's (1998a) three modes of belonging, I concluded that NLAU students constructed their identities by *engaging* with their immediate interpersonal context, through participating in CoPs and friendships. This involves the mutual processes of embodied practice and its reification through (d)iscourse. Their engagement involves relationships of participation and non-participation with CoPs and fostering and maintaining friendships through (d)iscourse and embodied practice. Students also used their *imagination* to identify with larger social configurations across space and time, including communities associated with specific geographical areas, and also geographically dispersed communities based on affinity, ideology or shared ethnicity or heritage. In some cases, these relationships remained imaginary while others involved *alignment* of activities with the enterprises of these social configurations. As in relationships with CoPs, imaginary relationships

may include dissociation as well as association. Similarly, friendships, in addition to being sites of engagement, are also the object of discourse identity work, through associational embracing and distancing. This work aligns with other research on learner autonomy that utilises SLT.

I argued that descriptions of identity construction alone were unable to account for the autonomy of the choices that drove it, pointing to the necessity of inquiry into the authenticity of values and their relationship with choices. Therefore, in addressing the secondary research question of how NLAU students take control over the processes of their identity construction, I synthesised the conclusions of the inquiry group with literature on identity and personal autonomy. I concluded that the challenging environment of NLAU often caused students to have critical experiences, which prompted them to self-read, which enabled self-definition through self-direction, which, I argued, gave them increased control over their identities and, thus, made them more autonomous as learners.

Descriptions of the learning trajectories of NLAU students clearly demonstrated that their learner autonomy was subject to affordances and constraints, leading to the secondary research question of how this was so. The IGMs quickly recognised the constraints associated with their sociohistorical constitution, particularly their schooling prior to NLAU; and the central role played by emotions in mediating self-reading and the reliance on bodily faculties to function in the world pointed to the way that learner autonomy is afforded and constrained by our embodied constitution. However, my focus was on how learner autonomy was manifested in NLAU specifically, leading to the focus on the context of NLAU as an agent in the learner autonomy of its students. Interpreting the critical experiences of the students in terms of Massey's (2005) concept of place as 'relational', 'mutually constituted locally and globally', 'dynamic', 'internally heterogeneous', 'open and unfinished', and 'unique', I concluded that the way that NLAU was organised exaggerated all of these characteristics in such a way that made critical experiences in students more likely. This brought to light affordances and constraints relating to our ever-emplaced selves. Highlighting the impact of institutional organisation on the learner autonomy and the identities of students, I argued, brought to the fore the inherently political nature of education.

I do not intend to suggest that all students go through these processes, or that the disruptive experiences described here always have outcomes that are positive to their learner autonomy. Neither do I suggest that learner autonomy can only be achieved through critical experiences. However, through rigorous inquiry, involving thirty-five students, some of whom invested many hours of reflection on these issues, this was identified as a process that was significant to the lives of many NLAU students. And these conclusions have implications for learner autonomy as a universal construct, which are discussed next.

This inquiry has caused me to reconceive learner autonomy. I retain the basic premise that learner autonomy is the capacity to exercise control over one's learning, but I extend it to take account of the entailments that emerged as significant through this inquiry. The result is the following definition:

Learner autonomy is the capacity to exercise control in learning (a process of identity construction, involving engagement, imagination and alignment), which amounts to self-definition through self-direction (which may require either resistance or resolve) on the basis of authentic values arrived at through self-reading, in relation to the affordances and constraints inherent to the embodied, sociohistorical and emplaced self.

Conceiving learner autonomy in this way allowed me to inquire beyond the ways that NLAU students were "differentially positioned" (Toohey and Norton, 2003: 65) within their social contexts, and how this relates to their identity (which is typically the limit of socioculturally oriented learner autonomy research), to the processes that constitute the agency in identity construction. Examining critical experiences from the perspective of personal autonomy made salient the relationship between emotions, (d)iscourse, self-knowledge, values and choices in exercising control in identity construction - in learner autonomy - in ways that are unique to the field. Finally, I have found no other studies that examine the ways that the processes by which students exercise control in their learning (their learner autonomy, with the emphasis on autonomy) are afforded and constrained by place at the level of the whole university, from the perspective of

institutional organisation and in terms of its interrelations with other places across space and time. In the next and final chapter, I discuss the significance of these conclusions.



# Chapter 7 - Conclusion

## 7.1 Introduction

I return now, for a moment, to the analogy of the thesis as a tapestry, described in section 1.3. It is the work of the participants, me, the authors of all the literature from which I drew, and all those who supported me. Ultimately, my work was part weaver and part assembler: large sections of the tapestry were created by the inquiry group from the fibres and threads of their own experiences of engagement in their complex realities, and of the experiences of participants in their own inquiry. I then drew these 'scenes' together with concepts from the literature to create what I hope is a coherent whole, depicting the inquiry's answer to the primary research question of *how learner autonomy is manifested in the context of Northern Liberal Arts University (NLAU), an English medium, international liberal arts university, situated in Japan*. Both the process of the tapestry's weaving and what it depicts bear significance to those involved in the inquiry, NLAU, the learner autonomy research community, those involved in education, and to society more broadly. The purpose of this chapter is to outline this significance in terms of the impact of the research and its implications for broader academic or societal issues, and to acknowledge limitations and questions raised that point to possible avenues for further research. I discuss first, in section 7.2, the weaving of the tapestry - the inquiry process - and then what the tapestry depicts - the findings - in 7.3, before presenting my final conclusion in 7.4.

## 7.2 "The weaving of the tapestry": significance of the inquiry process

The quality of this research rests firmly on the methodology that I described in Chapter 3. Had I relied on methods tried and tested by the learner autonomy research community and not utilised the methods that I did, I suspect the contribution made by the inquiry would have been much diminished. I argue that both the use of multimodal narratives and participatory methods bore significance for those involved in the

research (including me), NLAU, the learner autonomy field and for educators and educational researchers. I discuss the significance of the multimodal narrative method in subsection 7.2.2 and that of the participatory methods in in 7.2.3. Before that, however, in subsection 7.2.1, I briefly evaluate them and reflect on their limitations in terms of the criteria laid out in section 3.1.5.

### *7.2.1 Evaluation of the methods*

There were limitations that are inherent to social science in general, from the perspective of the ontological and epistemological position I took. In particular, although I made what I deem to be legitimate claims about the nature of learner autonomy as a universal philosophical construct, one must be tentative in generalising about the specific manifestations of learner autonomy that were evident in empirical data taken from a single context. Such limitations are due to constraints that are inherent to the nature of reality and our capacity to know it and are, thus, insurmountable. However, other limitations were caused by the limited time and resources available to me and the participants; had circumstances allowed me to involve a greater number of students in the inquiry who could dedicate more of their time to it, the inquiry would have yielded even richer data from more perspectives, thereby providing a more complete picture (in fact, I consider replication of this study in, either, the same or other similar contexts a promising avenue for future research). Within these constraints, however, I endeavoured to maximise the quality of the research according to criteria set out in section 3.1.5: ‘rich rigour’, ‘sincerity’, ‘credibility’, ‘meaningful coherence’ and ‘ethicality’. I would argue that I have evidenced the fulfilment of this criteria throughout the thesis. However, this conclusion is not the place for an in-depth analysis, so for a more comprehensive appraisal along with reflections on what I would do differently if I were to repeat the study, please see appendix 7.1..

### *7.2.2 Significance of the use of multimodal narrative inquiry*

The use of narrative inquiry is widespread in research on learner autonomy (as noted in subsection 3.3.1.1), with good reason. The narratives of this inquiry group provided rich data on psychological, social and spatial aspects of their experiences (which make a significant contribution to the field in themselves) while simultaneously facilitating self-reading and self-definition, constituting a direct enhancement of their autonomy.

Yamato, for instance, as quoted in 5B.2, wrote in his reflective paragraph (RP) that the process of creating his multimodal narrative (MN) “helped [him to] have an objective view to analyze what affected [his] learning and how [he had] exercised control over [his] own learning”. Perhaps more novel to the learner autonomy research community (and, therefore, more significant in its contribution to its methodological knowledge), however, is the multimodality of the narratives. The use of modes besides language opened up new avenues of reflection - evidenced most strongly in Yuko’s statement (quoted in section 5B.2) that insights about her emotional trajectory “just came” to her as she drew her MN – and, since communication is undeniably multimodal (Kress, 2010), it stands to reason that the dialogical processes that constitute learner autonomy are also multimodal; this has been neglected in the field thus far. I attempted to account for this by utilising video recording and collecting all visual artefacts created by the inquiry group, but I propose that there is much more to be learned about the role of multimodal semiotic resources in our identity construction and our (learner) autonomy, pointing to a fruitful area of future research.

### *7.2.3 Significance of the participatory design*

The benefits of using participatory research methods in this inquiry were manifold. The framework within which the inquiry was carried out assured direct impact on the participants (the inquiry group and, to a lesser extent, the participants in the student-led inquiry (SLI)) and the university. Engaging them in the collaborative interpretation of their MNs and research on the experiences of their peers compounded the self-knowledge gains enabled by the construction of their MNs, described above: as quoted in Section 5B.2, Ayuka wrote in her RP, “I was able to see my path at NLAU objectively by listening to what other student researchers said”, for example. In particular, they

developed a shared understanding of the sociocultural processes to which they were subject. Akari, for instance, wrote in her RP (quoted in section 5B.4), “throughout this research, I realized that NLAU students more or less in the same environment have gone through the experience of *zassetsu* which is kind of the rite of passage”. There is also some evidence to suggest that the knowledge gained assisted the inquiry group members in making significant life decisions: Yuko, for instance, said two years later that “[w]orking with [me] helped [her] to come to terms with [her] identity as bicultural/bilingual self and made [her] decide what [she] wanted to do” (quoted in section 5B.4). These contributions to the self-knowledge and self-direction of the IGMs constitute an enhancement of their learner autonomy.

A more direct practical impact was that the inquiry group gained experience of participation in a doctoral research project, which served their agendas in ways that included preparing for graduate school and completing course work. To maximise this, I included all participants as named authors on a paper I presented at the 2018 Hawaii International Conference on Education (Sykes et al., 2018) and, in all cases, we found ways for them to gain course credits, assisting in their path to graduation. In addition, the outcomes of the SLI were translated directly into policy recommendations, which were implemented, signifying a direct impact on the institutional framework of the university and, thus, the students enrolled at that time. As described in section 5A.15, a policy recommendation brief was presented to the university president and vice president. This led to a university wide program, based on the results of the SLI, that engaged all incoming students in reflection, dialogue and journal entries about their experiences at NLAU, integrated with an electronic learning portfolio project. The program involved workshops during orientation, on graduation from EAP, before and after study abroad and at the end of their time at NLAU and ran from 2018 to 2020 before being terminated along with the portfolio project (due to technical issues). However, facilitating reflection on learning trajectories remains integral to the NLAU curriculum. Besides the impact on the university, by elevating the voice of the inquiry group, the project increased their agency in their context.

In addition to the direct impact of the participatory inquiry process, there are also implications for the research community more broadly. I argue that the methods that I

utilised are more ethical and potentially more rigorous than researcher-centred methods that treat individuals as mere objects of inquiry. From an ethical perspective, in principle, working *with* participants to understand a phenomenon that has direct relevance to them achieves reciprocity. The contribution that this makes to methodological knowledge of the learner autonomy research community is particularly pertinent, since, there is generally an assumption that learner autonomy is valuable, meaning its enhancement (or at least its preservation) in the inquiry process is an ethical imperative. I argued above that this was realised in this project, suggesting that reciprocity was, in fact, achieved. Additionally, the way that the methods amplified the voice of students may be of interest to those concerned with 'Student Voice'.

In terms of rigour, the richness of the data generated by the project was a direct result of the commitment of the inquiry group to understand the phenomenon in question. On the one hand, I was very fortunate to have such intelligent and dedicated participants (for which I am very grateful). On the other hand, however, it was not by luck alone. Because the participants were at a point in their trajectory at which they were motivated to make sense of their time at NLAU, they were primed to invest time and energy in the project. The lesson for (qualitative) researchers here, then, is that in order to generate rich authentic data on any given phenomenon, it would serve us well to identify people who stand to benefit directly from exploring it. This promises to give research direct practical relevance, while also yielding theory that is empirically grounded, and relatively unconstrained by researcher preconceptions, allowing for the emergence of original insights (as I hope I have demonstrated in this thesis). Although there is a risk in such an approach that the voices of those less capable of expressing themselves are excluded, I believe the partially structured and multimodal methodological design employed in this inquiry served to mitigate these risks. Another benefit of the participatory methods that I used was that I was able to document the dialogical processes by which the inquiry group developed their understanding of the phenomenon. Word counts did not allow me to take full advantage of this, but it may be beneficial to examine this more closely in a future inquiry, a point that I take up at the end of subsection 7.3.2.

## 7.3 What the tapestry depicts: significance of the findings

While I argue the methods of this inquiry make a significant contribution to both the interests of the stakeholders in the research and to methodological knowledge, perhaps further reaching are the implications of the findings – what the tapestry depicts. Here, I discuss these in reference to the definition of learner autonomy that resulted from the synthesis, stated in section 6.5:

“Learner autonomy is the capacity to exercise control in learning (a process of identity construction, involving engagement, imagination and alignment), which amounts to self-definition through self-direction (which may require either resistance or resolve) on the basis of authentic values arrived at through self-reading; in relation to the affordances and constraints inherent to the embodied, sociohistorical and emplaced self.”

I consider this definition to have three components that correspond to the secondary research questions of the inquiry: 1) of *how NLAU students construct their identity in relation to their sociocultural, physical, and historical contexts*; 2) of *how they exercise control over these processes*; and 3) of *the affordances and constraints on these processes*. The first component refers to findings relating to learning conceived as identity construction; the second refers to findings that relate to processes involved in control - self-reading, self-defining and self-directing; and the third to findings on affordances and constraints. I discuss these components in terms of their implications for the context of the inquiry, for the learner autonomy field, for education more broadly and for society, in subsections 7.3.1, 7.3.2 and 7.3.3.

### 7.3.1 Implications of findings relating to identity construction

The inquiry yielded rich data on the social and individual psychological processes involved in identity construction from the whole life perspective that is required to examine situated learning. As I expounded in section 6.2, these findings contribute to research in this area. Furthermore, examining learning and learner autonomy from the

perspective of identity led to insights into critical experiences, which apart from being valuable in themselves brought into sharp relief autonomy related processes involved in the resolution of identity crises. Perhaps the most salient manifestation of this was the IGMs' awareness of their social constitution brought about by challenges to their identities; evidenced, for instance, in Yuko's comment on Ayuka's experiences on study abroad: "I think this was the biggest change, the way that you perceive the world changed because you became a minority, right? And that's why you became interested in Japanese immigrants", to which Ayuka agreed. This is significant to the learner autonomy research community and to those involved in education in multicultural and multilingual educational environments – the process should be acknowledged, and educators should make efforts to turn such experiences to the advantage of those who experience them.

In terms of further research, these insights into the challenges experienced by Japanese L1 students, who were a linguistic majority in this context, raise questions about the (presumably different and perhaps greater) challenges presented to international exchange and degree-seeking students, from linguistic backgrounds other than English, in this context. There are many such students who share an L1 with none or only a few other students. Some insights were gleaned on this phenomenon from representations of NLAU students' experiences on study abroad and accounts of one of the participants in the SLI who was not Japanese (and who experienced challenges of different kinds) but considering the superdiverse constitution of the NLAU student body, inquiry into the perspectives of international students could provide valuable insights into identity challenges within multilingual environments. This is an area that demands inquiry.

### *7.3.2 Implications of findings relating to control in learning*

As noted throughout the thesis, conceiving learning as identity construction demands a whole life perspective on the learner, which by default brings issues of personal autonomy into the picture, but (as I argued in section 6.2) this has been mostly neglected in the field. In fact, as stated in section 2.4, I take the view that learner autonomy *entails* personal autonomy, and the difference is only a matter of emphasis: personal autonomy refers to the capacity of individuals to run their own lives and

learner autonomy is concerned with the development of identities. Without proper consideration of the *autonomy* in learner autonomy the value of the concept, and indeed the field, is much diminished. It lacks theoretical coherence and, without a coherent theory of learner autonomy, pedagogies designed to foster it may inadvertently undermine autonomy at a more fundamental level, thereby proving to be self-defeating. I hope this thesis will serve to advance the field in this way.

The theory of learner autonomy developed in this thesis, with the relationship between values (the principles by which people believe they ought to live), self-knowledge (including egocentric knowledge) and choices, stands in contrast to most learner autonomy theory that implicitly rests on Kantian notions of rational mastery over our drives and emotions, and defers to external sources of guidance. By positing our own values as the locus of control in our identity, and the role of knowledge of our multifaceted self (as unitary, relational, social, divided and embodied) in choosing values that are coherent with our multifaceted selves, our minds (and our autonomy) are reconnected with our bodies and (re)placed within our contexts. (Learner) autonomy, in this sense, is a kind of rationality that concerns us with 'the good life' – what we consider to be a life worth living - and without this, we are guided by an instrumental mode of reason in which nothing has meaning or value except as a means to an end (Taylor, 1991).

Although this inquiry has provided valuable insights into the role of values, emotions and (d)iscourse in learner autonomy within large scale learning trajectories, I suggest that a fruitful line of future inquiry would be to examine more closely the dialogical processes involved in mediating autonomy related processes on a moment-to-moment basis. Videos and transcripts of identity-oriented (d)iscourse, such as those collected for the present inquiry, could provide raw data for such an inquiry and I propose the utilisation of a multimodal social semiotic analytical framework, such as that developed by Kress (2010), to examine them from the perspective of learner autonomy processes.



### *7.3.3 Implications relating to affordances and constraints on learner autonomy*

That our (learner) autonomy is afforded and constrained by dint of being embodied, sociohistorical and emplaced, as stated in the definition above in addition to the ways that this is manifested in the context of the inquiry, holds perhaps the most profound implications for education and for society.

Our embodiment fundamentally affords and constrains everything we do (as first noted in section 2.4). This is a proposition so banal that the ways in which this is so are often overlooked. As noted earlier, our visceral and emotional experiences, which arise in our embodied selves, can prompt self-reading, leading to self-knowledge, enabling greater autonomy. Furthermore, the exercise of the autonomy competencies - self-reading, self-definition and self-direction - are contingent on the emotional conditions of self-trust, self-worth and self-respect. In these ways, as noted above, our emotions are intertwined with our autonomy, contrasting starkly with those notions of autonomy associated with alienation from one's emotions, criticised by feminist scholars, as mentioned in section 2.4. Since our emotions are largely contingent on our context, they must be considered in a way that reflects their integral role in any educational initiatives attempting to promote learner autonomy.

As I hope the inquiry makes clear, our accumulated sociocultural experience constitutes a significant part of our identity, which brings to light the role of our cultural context in shaping our selves. In the context of this inquiry, we found that the Japanese common and contested discourses and institutionalised beliefs and practices promote homogeneity, which discourages the reading, defining and directing of the self - a constraint on autonomy. Nevertheless, NLAU was found to afford these autonomy competencies and, although not the focus of the inquiry, Akari's pre-NLAU experiences (described in section 4.5) provided instances of her autonomy being afforded in other contexts in Japan. In addition, as I described in section 1.6, there have been efforts to promote autonomy through educational policy. Further inquiry may be required to gain a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the Japanese context affords and

constrains the autonomy of its citizens. In section 1.4, I voiced concerns about my educational initiatives in relation to Japan's ideological context, but we can safely conclude that, contrary to the vision of homogeneity apparently fostered among Japanese people and the almost one-party government, Japan is a pluralistic society with many opposing voices, leaving me committed to fostering learner autonomy in my teaching. Considering our sociohistorical constitution, it stands to reason that all cultural contexts afford and constrain the autonomy of those within them, pointing to the value of ethnographic inquiries such as this, in any educational context seeking to promote learner autonomy.

While the sociohistorical self is the result of a gradual accumulation of sociocultural experience, it is always manifested in a particular point in time in a place. As noted first in section 5B.2, I refer to this as the emplaced self, constituted in the interplay between Meyers' (2005) 'embodied', 'relational' and 'social' selves in relation to a specific place. As noted in section 6.4, educational institutions are places that have been *organised* with the intention of shaping the identities of the students within; this is a proposition with profound political implications because educational administrators (and teachers) have the power to make choices that can either foster or undermine the autonomy of students. NLAU is an educational institution with the explicit purpose of promoting the autonomy of its students and, as noted in section 6.4, organisational efforts resulted in the following characteristics: an autonomy ethos, which encouraged the exercise of the autonomy competencies; exaggerated heterogeneity of the student body and an exaggerated and explicit interconnection with other places, both of which served to broaden horizons of significance and prompted critical experiences; and the English medium liberal arts curriculum, which brought its own identity challenges, but also enabled the development of egocentric knowledge. While these aspects of NLAU were all found to hold the potential to afford learner autonomy, they were also found to have the potential to constrain it. As noted in subsection 6.4.10, the research documented in this thesis contributes to the relatively new area of research focusing on learner autonomy in relation to space and place and, to my knowledge, it is the first to focus on the role of the institution as an agent in the learner autonomy of its students. It stands to reason that all educational institutions have such affordances and constraints, which, as Jiménez Raya et al. (2007, 2017) point out, should be the object of inquiry.

Once we acknowledge that learner autonomy is contingent on contextual affordances and constraints, as noted in subsection 6.4.9, the mutual relationship between the autonomy of the individual and of the collective in which they are situated becomes apparent: ignorance of the social constitution of the place in which one is situated suggests ignorance of the social self, and having no influence over the constitution of the place means that our identities are shaped by forces beyond our control and possibly under the deliberate control of others (as in cultural hegemony or indeed as may be the case in educational institutions), suggesting heteronomy. Thus, learner autonomy is contingent on a level of social engagement in the context that shapes it. This also points to the broader question of whether our current political arrangements allow for collective autonomy, by encouraging engagement and participation. I suspect that most of the world's political and education systems fall short in this regard.

As I argued in Chapter 5, part B, the methods of this inquiry facilitated a degree of collective autonomy in the context of NLAU, but to understand the extent to which this is otherwise present in NLAU would require further inquiry. This points to another area of valuable future inquiry: to understand the roles of not only students, but also teachers and administrators, in the constitution of educational institutions, and the extent to which they are aware of it. Such inquiry would not only provide insights into collective autonomy in educational contexts, but may also go some way to fostering it, as the in the present inquiry.

## 7.4 Conclusion

Here, at the end of the inquiry, I describe my vision of a better world and how education ought to be in order to help realise it. I do not claim these ideas as original, nor (hopefully) overly radical, but they are supported by the thrust of this thesis.

It is tempting to believe that crises such as the ones facing the world today - the climate crisis and the threat of nuclear war, to name but two – could be avoided if decisions were made by an engaged and informed citizenry who stood to be affected by them,

rather than by representatives who are guided by interests that often stand in contrast to our collective wellbeing. Such direct democracy is, technologically speaking, a possibility (particularly with web 2 internet and, perhaps, even more so with web 3 decentralised internet technologies). Such a world, however, requires autonomous individuals (in the way that I have described in this thesis), who make up such an autonomous collective.

At the beginning of the thesis, in section 1.4, reflecting on my earliest experiences of education, I wrote that “I like learning, but I value my autonomy”. This statement articulates a naïve yet fundamental assumption about the issues addressed in this thesis: that formal education was somehow antithetical to personal autonomy. As I hope is already evident, I now firmly believe that formal education *can* enhance (learner) autonomy *if* sufficient attention is paid to facilitating self-reading, self-definition and self-direction, enabling authentic values to guide identity, in relation to affordances and constraints.

In fostering these competencies, their dialogical constitution must be acknowledged, so value-oriented dialogue should be encouraged. As stressed at various points in this thesis, the development of knowledge of the self requires egocentric knowledge of the world, pointing to the need for the rigorous development of knowledge of the natural, sociohistorical, economic and political world, within which we can place ourselves, in addition to knowledge of human psychology. This should not only be fostered on a scientific basis, but also through the humanities, artistically (broadly conceived) and experientially. Considering the dialogical nature of autonomy and of knowledge development, skills of expression should also be fostered, including (pluri)linguistic, visual, musical modes. Students, teachers and administrators should make up an autonomous collective – meaning all are critically aware of the constitution of the institution and all should have a voice. That is not to say that they should all have an equal voice; expertise should be recognised and granted a degree of authority, but all must have a voice that is heard, encouraging engagement in the constitution of the institution. Such a vision would require no new buildings or facilities, or even new school subjects, only a change in mindset and change in organisational structure.

Whether against the algorithms of TikTok, Facebook or Google, the hegemony of the neoliberal world order, or the ascendent nationalist political strongmen, on the left and right, who seek to overturn it, the battle for control over our identities continues. I argue that autonomy should be considered as fundamental to educational ethics as it is to medical ethics since education is as much an intervention into our identities as medicine is into our bodies. Education is uniquely positioned to constrain or afford our autonomy, so it is our responsibility as educators to strive to create affordances for it to flourish.

# Appendices

## *Appendix 3.1 – Prompt for the Multimodal Research Journal (MJR)*

### **Multimodal Research Journal**

The multimodal research journal will be used to keep track of your actions and thoughts, as well as provide a reflective space for the development of your thinking. You can work in language (English, Japanese or other), pictures or any other mode that helps you to express yourself. I have provided both a notebook and a USB stick to use for this purpose. I hope you will use the journal regularly. I will collect the notebook and the data from the USB stick at the end of the semester.

## *Appendix 3.2 – Prompt for the Collaborative Narrative Analysis (CNA)*

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Action - Narrative Analysis**

The narrative analysis will be done together as a group. The goal of the analysis is to identify the **ways** in which each person **exercised control over their learning** and what has **influenced** this. You are recommended to follow the steps below:

- Take turns to present your narratives.
- Everyone asks each presenter questions.
- Identify the ways that they have exercised control over their own learning or instances where they failed to do so and write them on the white board.
- Identify the influences in these instances/processes/experiences and write them on the board.
- Everyone makes a note of what is on the board.

### *Appendix 3.3 – Prompt for the Individual Conceptual Representation (ICR)*

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Action – Individual Conceptual Representation**

Each person will work individually to create a conceptual representation of the narrative analysis. This can be done in any mode or modes deemed most suitable for the purpose, but it must categorise ways that students exercise control over their learning and the elements that play a role in helping or hindering this process and show the relationships between them. These will be shared in the next session.

### *Appendix 3.4 – Prompt for the Collaborative Conceptual Representation (CCR)*

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Action – Representation of NLAU as a place of learning**

This representation will be done together as a group. You will draw on all the Individual Conceptual Representations of the group to create single representation of NLAU as a place where students can (or can't) exercise control over their own learning. It should include the **ways** in which individuals exercise control over their learning and what are the elements that **influence** this process (whether people, things, events, experiences or any other thing that may play a role). The 'place' of NLAU need not be limited to the physical campus area, it may also include NLAU related activities that are done off campus, such as study abroad or work placements. The representation can be done in any mode or modes, this is one of the decisions you will make as a group. If you need any special materials, discuss this with Joe.

## *Appendix 3.5 – Prompt for the Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry (SLEI)*

### **5<sup>th</sup> Action – Ethnographic Research**

The Representation of NLAU as a place of learning (with its emphasis on the way that individuals exercise control over their own learning) may give you some understanding of the forces that shape the learning journey of individuals in NLAU. Think about what questions you might explore in order to gain a deeper understanding of learning in NLAU (emphasising learners taking control of their own learning). Write these questions below (you don't need to fill the spaces, or if you decide that you need more, you may write them elsewhere).

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Then think about how you could explore these questions, using qualitative methodologies. Consider the following:

- What are the most appropriate methodologies for exploring these questions?
- If this research will involve other people, who would be the most appropriate people to use?
- What do you need to do before you can begin collecting the data?



## *Appendix 3.6 – Sample of the multimodal analysis of the Multimodal Narratives (MNs)*

### Analysis of Ayuka's Narrative

#### **The themes/important episodes identified by the group**

- The biggest decision made was to change her career path and decide not to apply to graduate school instead of job hunting
- They split the narrative into three parts: before study abroad; during study abroad; after study abroad. During the analysis most attention was paid to her time during her study abroad, presumably because this seemed to be the most significant period to them.
  - During study abroad
    - She met Dr. Ming, a sociology professor who had an impact on her
    - Being a foreigner and a minority gave her a new perspective
    - As a result, she became interested in immigrants in Japan
    - She realised that it is not easy to be an immigrant, due to the cultural context and language.
    - She acquired a sense of responsibility for being a member of the majority group in Japan.
  - After study abroad
    - She volunteered at an NPO that helped immigrants associated with the Toyota plant in Aichi.
  - Before study abroad
    - She was originally interested in international conflict and poverty, particularly the Israel and Palestine conflict.
- Religious background was noted to have been significant
- The group identified friendship to be a source of confidence that enabled her to make decisions, which gave her a meaningful college life.

#### **Themes and episodes from the multimodal narrative**

- People were important –
  - She was inspired by people from different countries and backgrounds
  - Her roommates, suitemates and bible study group friends made her life meaningful
- She always had clearly defined academic interests which were closely linked to her sense of justice and moral responsibility (my interpretation)
  - In freshman, she was obliged to study EAP, but her real interests lay in the developing world and poverty
  - She went on a study trip to Vietnam and volunteered at an orphanage, and on returning held a fair trade café at the school festival to raise money to support the orphanage
  - After taking classes like ‘criminal justice’ and ‘international relations’, her interests shifted to international relations and racial conflict. She was interested in the Middle East and, in particular, the Israel/Palestine conflict, and she decided to focus on US policy towards Israel for her graduate thesis.
  - For her study abroad she went to Jackson, Mississippi, in the US, where, although she had fun and made friends, she experienced first-hand life as a foreigner and a minority. At this time she was also taking mostly sociology related courses, which she was as closely related to what she was experiencing as an outsider in the US. This prompted an interest in immigrants and minorities in Japan.
  - On returning to Japan, she spent some time in her hometown, in Aichi, where, from her new perspective, she realised that there is a large immigrant population of Brazilians, working in the Toyota plant. She volunteered for an NPO, teaching Japanese to the children of immigrants (who, in many cases, did not attend school to work and earn money for the family). She was inspired by their “earnest efforts” and decided that she wanted helping them to be her career. This prompted another change in her academic interests and her graduate thesis topic to “Paths of immigrant children in Japan”.

- There were strong relationships between her sense of moral responsibility, academic content learned in class, her experiences outside the classroom, the places she was in, and her academic interests and aspirations:
  - Moral responsibility: from the beginning her interests involved helping the disadvantaged
  - Academic content: classes nudged her academic interests (eg. International relations shifter to an interest in the Israel/Palestine conflict), and sociology classes heightened her awareness of what was happening outside of the classroom in her life.
  - Experiences outside of the classroom: her experiences of being a minority in the US and her experience volunteering both in Vietnam and in her hometown had an impact on her academic interests and career aspirations, and changed her perspective on what she was learning in the classroom.
  - Places: Being in Jackson Mississippi, with its history of slavery and contemporary race issues, heightened her sociological consciousness, and her love of her hometown and its immigration issues informed her career aspirations.

### **Themes and episodes from the conversations**

- She acknowledged that her Christian beliefs may have been part of the reason for her interest in the Israel Palestine conflict.
- Living in different places changed her perspective:
  - Her experiences as an immigrant in the US changed her perspective on her hometown.
  - She admitted that the place of her study abroad played a big role in her sociological awakening, due to the racial politics and history
- Sociology changed her perspective and how she lives outside the classroom. She began to relate academic theories to usual everyday experiences
- She feels a strong responsibility to her hometown
  - She wants to learn more about sociology and immigration and go to graduate school to help her hometown

- The working conditions of the Brazilian workers at Toyota shocked her.
- Ayuka demonstrated strong agency
  - She made big decisions based on the changes in perspective that she experienced
  - Yamato pointed out that she has a strong sense of purpose and took full advantage of the opportunities offered by NLAU to pursue them.
  - She made some major decisions: she changed her grad thesis topic and decided to go to grad school rather than entering a company
  - She read independently about immigration in Japan, once she had decided to focus on that for her thesis.
- Her sociology teacher in the US, Dr. Ming, had encouraged her to go to grad school.
- She likes to study in the library because she likes the smell of the books and she can concentrate well in there.
- A common thread through all of the twists and turns in her interests is a desire to help oppressed people

### **Findings from the multimodal aspects**

Notes on method:

My goal here is to analyse the images and other semiotic entities and representational features in order to find ways that they support (or conflict with) the themes outlined above, as well as being open to additional themes that maybe lying behind the multimodal narrative. I will draw conclusions on the choice of images, framing devices etc. and also the content, composition and other representational features of the images. I need a framework to work with for this purpose.

The framework that I will use is Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Reading images: the grammar of visual design*. The chapters of this book cover aspects of representation that I can look for in the images that Ayuka used in her multimodal narrative:

- Narrative representation
- Conceptual representation
- Representation and interaction

- The meaning of composition
- Materiality and meaning

Process:

1. For each screen, identify the participants
2. Identify the major and minor processes
3. Identify implications

### Notes on the medium

Prezi was used, which allowed her to present the whole narrative on a single canvas, with components arranged spatially, which she zoomed into as she told her narrative orally. **What is the significance of this? Can I find anything in literature on the analysis of moving images?**

#### *1<sup>st</sup> screen – the whole canvas*

The first screen shows a temporal analytical process, with what appear to be stages arranged along an arrow with years marked along its length. There is a large arrow at the bottom that emphasises the passage of time. Although there are arrows indicating the passage of time, I argue that this is not a narrative process because, apart from the order in which they happened, there is no indication of how the stages are connected, and the stages are presented as discrete objects contained within black frames. The embellishment on the title and near the bottom suggest an effort to diminish the formality of the image, but it remains an analytical process.

The Carrier is indicated by the title, “My Learning at NLAU”, and the Possessive Attributes are the stages and the timeline formation. Each possessive attribute constitutes an embedded analytic process, which will be examined in detail subsequently.

## What are the implications of this?

### *2<sup>nd</sup> Screen – Map showing Aichi*

It is a map of Japan, with the boundaries between prefectures marked. Aichi is highlighted. Aichi is her hometown, which is situated in Japan. Here I would argue that Aichi is the Carrier and the rest of the map of Japan is a Possessive Attribute, since the map is merely to represent Aichi as situated in Japan.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Screen – Map showing Akita*

Same as above but with Akita highlighted as the place she went to University. The way the screen panned from the map showing Aichi to the map showing Akita was a clear representation of her movement between the two places.

### *4<sup>th</sup> Screen – Pictures of freshman year*

Voice over: “During my freshman year, everyday I was inspired by people from different countries and Japanese friends who have diverse backgrounds”

The screen zoomed out from the map to what amounts to an Unstructured Analytical Process representing her freshman year. The carrier is implied in the voice over. The Possessive Attributes (PAs) are contained within a black frame, which suggests a relationship between them. They are the location, indicated by the map in the top left corner, and four group photos differing in size, perhaps signifying a hierarchy of significance, indicated by size. The group photos depict Ayuka as a happily involved member of an EAP class, a yosakoi club (a Japanese group dance genre), bible club and an intimate group of friends respectively (moving clockwise from the bottom left photo). Taken collectively, these photos support the voice over message that friends were the most important factor in her freshman year and could be interpreted as representing herself as socially successful in all domains – class, clubs and personal life.

Analysis of each photo may reveal something of the relationship Ayuka intends (consciously or not) the viewer to have with each group.

All photos are embedded Unstructured Analytical Processes representing Ayuka's social domains during this period: class, clubs, personal life. All engage the viewer with a gaze from the participants, signifying a demand. In most cases, participants are smiling, suggesting that they wish to appear happy and for the viewer to like them; however, some of the participants in the yosakoi club photo are not smiling and are, instead, performing yosakoi poses, suggesting that they wish to be perceived as yosakoi performers. In all cases, the photos were taken from a frontal horizontal angle, involving the viewer in the group. Both the gaze and the aspect create a relationship between the viewer and the participants. However, the differing frame sizes suggest different social distances from the viewer. The yosakoi club and EAP class photos are taken as a long shot (the former being longer than the latter), which signifies an impersonal relationship between the viewer and the participants. It may be that this is conventional for this genre of photo, where the collective is emphasised over the individual members of the group, rather than deliberate communication of social distance. Although the poses of the participants are smiling and casual, the formation of the group in both photographs is relatively formal. The photograph of the bible group was taken in the house of the teacher who runs the club, which immediately gives it a more casual atmosphere; this is reinforced by the presence of the dog and the teacher's son. All are smiling happily. The photograph of her close friends is taken at a medium close-up (showing participants from the waist up), signifying a 'far personal distance' from the viewer. I feel the need to be tentative drawing conclusions on the basis of frame size, since the practical matter of fitting all the PAs may have taken precedent over intentional communication of interpersonal matters. Finally, the individuals depicted in the photos can also be considered further embedded analytic processes, all with their own PAs, such as skin colour, clothing, hair style etc. The diversity of these individuals represents the diversity of the people who she said, in the voice over, inspired her during this period.

*5<sup>th</sup> Screen - Freshman academic interests and the Vietnamese orphanage*

Voice over: "These are my academic interests as a freshman. For my first semester, I was mostly studying English and academic writing in English, but my interest were in poverty and developing countries. We went Vietnam as a study tour and volunteered at an orphanage. We also held a Fair Trade Café at the school festival to support the orphanage."

Overall structure – unstructured analytical process

Carrier – Ayuka's academic interests (according to the voice over)

PAs – Text stating the key points that she mentions in her voice over, "Developing Countries" and "Poverty" are supported by the three photographs, but "English" and "Writing" are not, perhaps signifying the relative significance of these interests, emphasising the point made in the voice over that her primary interests were in poverty and developing countries rather than in English and academic writing. All photos were of her time in Vietnam at the orphanage. the way that the photos are laid out in the same manner as the text gives the impression of objectivity – elements of her freshman academic interests laid out for the viewer to examine, with an air of 'scientific realism'. Each photograph constitutes an embedded representational structure.

Significant findings from the photograph on the left:

The photo is an unstructured analytical process that represents some key elements from her time at the orphanage in Vietnam. There are the members and the way that they are arranged may signify some of the social dynamics within the group: the five female students on the left are leaning together, forming the most cohesive group within the larger group; the male student is standing behind and fades into the background; and, Ayuka forms a separate group with the orphan boy, who is leaning against her, breaking from the main pattern in which all members lean to the centre. This last point seems significant because it suggests that the boy trusts her the most, meaning that there is a history of Ayuka investing time and energy building this trust. The photograph is, in part, a representation of Ayuka's commitment to the work of helping the orphans in the orphanage.

Significant findings from the photograph on the top-right:



Ayuka's central position in a coherent group happily enjoying a meal represents Ayuka as a happily involved member of the group, thriving in an exotic location while carrying out good work. The photograph is taken from an oblique angle, which suggests detachment from the viewer, yet four of the participants, including Ayuka, are gazing into the camera, demanding of the viewer a relationship – the smiles and the V-signs invite a positive impression, the other may be feigning confusion for comedic value. Taken together, I infer that although they are demanding a relationship with the viewer, we are not invited to join their group.

Significant findings from the photograph on the bottom-right:

The compositional structure in this photograph may be significant. The same boy as in the previous photograph is in the centre (forming the nucleus of the image), while Ayuka and the other boy are at the margins (making them subservient to the boy). The interactive and narrative processes strengthen this message. In terms of interactive processes, the boy in the middle is not looking at the camera, making his relationship with the viewer an Offer – he is displaying himself behaving as if the camera (we) were not present – whereas the other two are gazing, smiling at the camera, making their relationship with the viewer a demand – they are inviting an impression of happiness. In terms of narrative processes. The boy in the centre is playing with a phone (probably Ayuka's) indifferent to the people on either side. The other two are leaning in towards him, giving the impression of indulgence. This image represents Ayuka as a selfless nurturer, dedicated to and enjoying her work helping the children of the orphanage. The background of this image clearly depicts what I assume to be the compound of the orphanage, which is clean, but decaying and dilapidated, and perhaps stereotypical of a developing country.

Taken together this image arrangement shows Ayuka as happily, successfully involved in the 'good' work of helping children in a developing country. Successful because she appears integrated in the group and engaged with the children. The images work with the words of the voice over to illustrate pictorially her interest in poverty and developing countries and at the same time subordinate her focus on English to these interests.

## *Screen 6 – Fair Trade Café and Friends*

Voice Over: “Two pictures on the top are the pictures of the Fair Trade Café. The other two pictures are my friends who always made my school life meaningful, my roommate and suitemate, and the members of the bible study club.”

Overall structure:

- Representational structures:
- Interactive processes
- Compositional processes
- Modality

Representational structures

There is a lack of coherence in this image and they were introduced by the voice over separately. The top two may have been better placed on the previous screen since they depict the Fair Trade Café, which was referred to in connection to the Vietnamese orphanage were, but there was not enough space, so for practical reasons, they were put on this screen. The bottom two seemed like an add-on, which were important for, but did not fit neatly in the flow of the narrative.

The two pairs of images were disconnected from each other by the voice over: the top two, the Fair Trade Café; the bottom, her important friends.

Top left photograph: Goods sold at the Fair Trade Café

- Representational structures: Covert taxonomy
  - Superordinate (implied) - goods sold at the Fair Trade Café
  - Subordinates – the goods with prices
- Interactive processes – objective image
- Compositional processes – nothing of interest
- Modality – high modality

Top right photograph – people involved in the Fair Trade Café

- Representational structures: Major - Inclusive Analytical Process

- Carrier – Fair Trade Café sign
- PAs - members' faces, some selected goods
- Interactive processes
  - Gaze – demand: smiling and holding a product, i.e. buy this product from me
  - Frame size - close-up: close personal distance with the viewer (like an advertisement)
  - Horizontal angle – Frontal: involved
  - Vertical angle – high: high viewer power
- Compositional processes
  - No frames, i.e. no disconnection. Represents unity
- Modality
  - Lowered modality, indicated by the decreased colour saturation. It looks like it has been altered in a photo editing software.

Significant findings from these two photographs:

These were probably taken as advertisements for the Fair Trade Café and were included only to illustrate, or perhaps to add credibility (photographic evidence) to her narrative. Ayuka's depiction as happy and involved fits with the theme of the other photos.

Bottom left photograph – suitemate and roommate

- Representational structures: Unstructured analytical process
  - Carrier (implied) – close friend group
  - PAs – Ayuka, two friends, cake
  - Symbolic process – cake: symbolises fun times for them
- Interactive processes
  - Gaze – demand: smiling, V-sign
  - Frame size - close-up: close personal distance with the viewer, one participant's face was cut in half but was slightly in the foreground, maybe she took the photograph.
  - Horizontal angle – Frontal: involve the viewer in their group
  - Vertical angle – eye-level: Equality
- Compositional processes – nothing of interest

- Modality – high

Bottom right photograph – bible study club

- Representational structures: Unstructured Analytical Process
  - Carrier – bible study group
  - PAs – members, teacher who runs it, Christmas tree
  - Symbolic process – Christmas tree: symbolises Christianity
- Interactive processes
  - All participants demand favourable impression from the viewer
  - Framesize – medium: close social distance from viewer
  - Frontal – involve viewer
  - High angle – high viewer power
- Compositional processes
  - No framing within the shot – unity among the group
- Modality: high

Significant findings from these two photographs:

The fact that she is showing these two photographs again suggests that these groups were especially significant to her. This was also stated in the voice over: “The other two pictures are my friends who always made my school life meaningful, my roommate and suitemate, and the members of the bible study club.”

*Screen 7 – Shift in academic interests and the Israel-Palestine student conference*

Voice over: “Through taking classes like Criminal Justice and International Relations, my academic interests shifted a little. I became more interested in international relations and racial conflicts, especially in the Middle East. I wanted to know more about the Israel-Palestine conflict, so I joined the Israel-Palestine student conference during the summer of my sophomore year. I made friends from Israel and Palestine and learned not only about the Israel-Palestine conflict, but also that we can understand each other personally, no matter how bad the diplomatic relationships between countries are. Before my study abroad, I decided my thesis topic as US foreign policy towards Israel.”

Overall structure:

- Representational structures: Unstructured Analytical Process
  - Carrier – Shift in academic interests to international conflict, especially between Israel and Palestine
  - PAs – photo of a session in the Israel-Palestine student conference; A group portrait of some participants at the conference; a more intimate photo of participants from the conference; text stating her academic interests
- Interactive processes – presented in an objective way
- Compositional processes – text in the middle and forming what could be conceived as a cohesive device between the photos
- Modality – scientific realism (almost like a diagram, with the photos representing the important aspects of the her shift in academic interests from poverty and developing countries to international relations and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Top Left Photo: conference session

- Representational structures: Multidirectional transactional action
  - Interactors – the conference participants (as indicated by the vectors formed by the gaze of participants over the table)
  - Locative circumstances – in a classroom, presumably part of the venue of the conference
- Interactive processes
  - Offer (a view of their participation in the conference)
  - Frame size: long shot – i.e. public distance
  - Oblique horizontal angle – detached relationship with the viewer
  - Slightly high vertical angle – high viewer power
  - Subjective image
- Compositional processes – participants are represented as a coherent whole by the lack of disconnection between them

- Modality – high naturalistic modality

#### Bottom Left Photograph

- Representational structures: Group Portrait – Unstructured Analytical Process
  - Carrier – the conference participants group
  - PAs – conference participants , Hiroshima in the background
  - Participants themselves are analytical processes, with possessive attributes such as facial features, hair colour and posing styles that mark them as Japanese or not Japanese (presumably Palestinian or Israeli)
- Interactive processes
  - All participants demand something of the viewer with their gaze. Most are smiling, suggesting that they want to be liked. Some have a more serious look, suggesting they want to be taken seriously.
  - Frame size: Medium shot (from the perspective of a unified whole) - far personal distance
- Compositional processes
  - Ayuka is near the centre, giving the viewer the sense that she is a central member of the group
- Modality – high naturalistic realism

#### Photo on the right – Casual group photo of conference members

- Representational structures: Unstructured Analytical Process
  - Carrier – Friends group among conference participants
  - PAs – 5 conference participants, location
  - Embedded analytical processes: each member is a carrier of their ethnicity (two Japanese, three Israeli or Palestinian)
  - Symbolic processes – V-sign
- Interactive processes
  - Gaze – Demand: smiles and v-signs (look at me having a good time with my new international friends)

- Frame size – group selfie, so photographer is medium close up, giving the impression of far personal distance, showing the viewer her friends, the most distant of whom (from the viewer) is Ayuka.
- Horizontal angle – (photographer) oblique: detached/(others) frontal: involved
- Vertical angle – slightly high: high viewer power
- Compositional processes
  - Ayuka is a little obscured from view making her seem a little less involved in the group
- Modality
  - High

Significant findings from this screen:

This slide illustrates a change in academic interests for Ayuka and she shows herself actively pursuing them by successfully and happily participating in the conference. Again she makes salient the social element of the experience and the resultant learning.

#### *Screen 8 – Location of her study abroad*

Voice over: “For my junior year I studied abroad in Mississippi, in the US. This study abroad experience changed the course of my life.”

- Representational structures: Exhaustive analytical structure
  - Carrier – Study abroad location: Jackson, Mississippi
  - PAs – map indicating the location within the US
- Interactive processes – Objective image
- Compositional processes – none of interest
- Modality: Scientific realism

#### *Screen 9 - Ayuka's study abroad experience*

Voice over: “I had a lot of fun to experience American culture and talk with American students and other international students at school. I was able to make wonderful

friends. On the other hand, I experienced being a foreigner, or a minority in the country, for the first time, and I felt that I was not included in American society. I was the only Japanese at school and I thought I was different from others. Not only my English was bad, but also I did not know how I could join in conversation with American friends. How they communicate was different from how Japanese do, and I realised that being an immigrant was not simple."

- Representational structures: Unstructured Analytical Process
  - Carrier – Her study abroad experience
  - PAs – map showing location; 4 photographs of buildings (presumably on campus); one group portrait
- Interactive processes – Objective image
- Compositional processes – group photo is the largest, therefore the most salient
- Modality – high scientific realism

Significant findings:

The voice over states that she had difficulty making friends, which is also represented in the photos by the lack of the usual photos of Ayuka being happily involved in multiple social domains. There is only one, relatively formal, group portrait. The other photos are of the buildings around campus, all of which completely devoid of people. This could signify the loneliness she felt there. The university was a collection of buildings because she failed to integrate herself into the community. The group photo seemed more like a representation of the diversity of the campus, rather than a way of situating Ayuka happily within a group of people. In the voice over, she stated that this sense of exclusion constituted a learning experience (even transformative). She experienced first hand the plight of immigrants.

*Screen 10 – Academic experience on study abroad*

Voice Over: "(Listed the courses she took, presented in text on the screen)... Although I was still interested in peace building from the perspective of international relations, I was fascinated by the classes of sociology. Learning sociology was looking at inequality in society. I liked the way they taught about racial relations and the history of



discrimination against minority in the US. I also liked the small sized classes. Except for the introduction class, sociology classes had only two to four students. I was in Jackson, Mississippi, and it was where the slavery system persisted for a long time. Living in the Deep South, I was able to see the racial gap in and outside school. The population of black students in my college did not represent the black population in Mississippi State. And people who engage in white collar jobs were not represented by the ratio of race in the state. Because I was an immigrant and a minority there, I thought that what I was learning in the classes was directly related to my experience there. As I learned about the racial inequality and minorities in the US, I came to be interested in the racial minority in Japan.”

- Representational structures: Unstructured Analytical structure
  - Carrier – her academic interests during study abroad
  - PAs – themes that she became interested written in black; Sociology representing the field that she had become interested in; a photograph of what appears to be the inside of the sociology department at the university.
- Interactive processes – objectively presented
- Compositional processes – Sociology is made salient by means of colour, the themes of ‘race’ and ‘inequality’ were made salient by means of a larger size of text.
- Modality – scientific realism

#### Photograph

- Representational structures: unstructured analytical process
  - Carrier – her learning environment
  - PAs – comfy chairs; pictures on the wall; worn furniture; a teacher (who later turned out to be Dr. Ming); an information desk
- Interactive processes
  - Only person is an offer
  - Oblique horizontal angle: detached, but subjective
  - Frame size – very long shot: public distance
- Compositional processes

- The teacher is less salient than almost all other participants in the picture
- Modality – very high naturalistic modality

Significant findings from this screen:

The social distance that she felt was also strongly represented in the photograph. Her emphasis on learning through social relationship appears to have been replaced by a more objective, detached form of learning, based on academic learning and critical reflection.

*Screen 11 - Location of Aichi (back to the hometown)*

Voice Over: “After finishing study abroad, I came back to Aichi prefecture, where I was born and raised. Even though I should know well about my hometown, I did not know that Aichi has so many Brazilians, until I learned about minorities in the US and became interested in this topic”

*Screen 12 – Volunteering in Toyota*

Voice over: “I decided to volunteer to help immigrants in my hometown. I knew that there were many foreign children who worked to earn money without compulsory education. So I taught Japanese to immigrant children, in Toyota in Olympia organisation, and supported their study. Being inspired by their earnest efforts, I came to think that I wanted to help them as my career.”

Overall structure: Volunteering in Toyota

- Representational structures: Unstructured analytical process
  - Carrier – her experience volunteering for Olympia, Toyota

- PAs – map indicating location; 4 photos (one of a departing bus, one students hard at work in a classroom, a teacher in front of a whiteboard, and food at a potluck party)
- Interactive processes – objective image
- Compositional processes – nothing of interest
- Modality – scientific realism

Top photo – classroom

- Representational structures: Narrative process
  - Multiple unidirectional processes
  - Vectors are formed between the actors' eyes and their books
- Interactive processes
  - Subjective perspective
  - Offer – they allow the viewer to observe them at work
  - Frame size: Long shot – social distance
  - Oblique horizontal angle: detached
  - High vertical angle: high viewer power
- Compositional processes – nothing of interest
- Modality: poor picture quality lowers modality, but probably accidentally .  
Otherwise it is high modality from a naturalistic perspective.

Other photographs: narrative processes, telling the story of the kinds of things that she did during her time volunteering at Toyota. It may be significant that she no longer places herself in the images, she has taken a more objective, detached perspective in describing these experiences. Neither is there any gaze from any of the participants, we are merely observers of the activities that constituted her volunteering. No more pictures of her engaging and becoming close to the students. No more smiling group portraits. Down to business.

Screen 13 – Current academic interests

Voice over: “

- Representational structures: Covert taxonomy
  - Superordinate – current academic interests
  - Subordinates – main topic of interest (Japanese Brazilians) ; themes related to the main topic of interest
- Interactive processes – objective image
- Compositional processes – Main topic is made salient by means of a different colour to the related themes
- Modality – scientific realism

Emerging themes

- In the early slides she portrays herself as successful in all her social domains
- She shows herself as committed to doing good work
- Her bible study club and her close friends came up more than once, meaning that they were important
- Ayuka as serious and cosmopolitan
- Relationships inform her learning
- The way that she represented her experiences became increasingly detached and objective as she went through.

## *Appendix 3.7 – Sample of dismissed form of representation of my Multimodal Narrative (MN) analysis*

### **4.2.1 Ayuka**

In the classroom where all members of the group were gathered, Ayuka, the first to complete her MN, readied herself to present her experiences. She had prepared a prezzi to accompany the oral presentation of her narrative, which constituted an overview screen, titled, “My Learning at NLAU”. On the screen was a timeline, along which eight frames representing the stages of her learning were arranged, each containing words and/or images. As she presented, the screen zoomed in and panned between frames. The other participants were supportive, encouraging her when she indicated that she was nervous about presenting. Throughout the presentation, the participants asked questions and drew additional information from her. At the end of the session, I asked Ayuka to include a recorded voice-over with the prezzi. She agreed and what I present is based primarily on that ([click here to see the original](#)), but I provide additional details that emerged in the conversational style of its original presentation.

#### *4.2.1.1 Text of Ayuka’s MN*

I present here a transcript of the audio component of Ayuka’s MN along with some additional points that arose during conversations when Ayuka presented it to the inquiry group.

“This presentation is about my learning experiences at Northern Liberal Arts University. I’m from Aichi Prefecture, and in 2014, I moved to Akita for my school. During my freshman year every day I was inspired by people from different countries and Japanese friends who have diverse backgrounds. These are my academic interests as a freshman [referring to the slide – content will follow]. For my first semester, I was mostly studying English and academic writing in English, but my interests were in poverty and developing countries.

We went Vietnam as a study tour and volunteered at an orphanage. We also held a Fair-Trade Café at the school festival to support the orphanage. [Referring to screen 4 in the original MN] Two pictures on the top are the pictures of the Fair-Trade Café. The other two pictures are my friends who always made my school life meaningful, my roommate and suitemate, and the members of the bible study club.”

“Through taking classes like Criminal Justice and International Relations, my academic interests shifted a little. I became more interested in international relations and racial conflicts, especially in the Middle East. I wanted to know more about the Israel-Palestine conflict, so I joined the Israel-Palestine student conference during the summer of my sophomore year. I made friends from Israel and Palestine and learned not only about the Israel-Palestine conflict, but also that we can understand each other personally, no matter how bad the diplomatic relationships between countries are. Before my study abroad, I decided my thesis topic as US foreign policy towards Israel.”

When I asked her why she was interested in the Israel-Palestine conflict, she thought that it was partly due to her Christian upbringing.

“For my junior year I studied abroad in Mississippi, in the US. This study abroad experience changed the course of my life. I had a lot of fun to experience American culture and talk with American students and other international students at school. I was able to make wonderful friends. On the other hand, I experienced being a foreigner, or a minority in the country, for the first time, and I felt that I was not included in American society. I was the only Japanese at school and I thought I was different from others. Not only my English was bad, but also, I did not know how I could join in conversation with American friends. How they communicate was different from how Japanese do, and I realised that being an immigrant was not simple.”

“During study abroad, the classes I took included: immigration; peace/conflict resolution; concepts of peace and violence; introduction to sociology; and class and race. Although I was still interested in peace building from the perspective of international relations, I was fascinated by the classes of sociology. Learning sociology was looking at inequality in society. I liked the way they taught about racial relations and the history of discrimination against minority in the US. I also liked the small sized classes. Except for the introduction class, sociology classes had only two to four students. I was in Jackson, Mississippi, and it was where the slavery system persisted for a long time. Living in the Deep South, I was able to see the racial gap in and outside school. The population of black students in my college did not represent the black population in Mississippi State. And people who engage in white collar jobs were not represented by the ratio of race in the state [she noted during the session that although there were not many black students, all cleaning staff were black, for instance]. Because I was an immigrant and a minority there, I thought that what I was learning in the classes was directly related to my experience there. As I learned about the racial inequality and minorities in the US, I came to be interested in the racial minority in Japan.”

In conversation with the group after her initial presentation, Ayuka related an anecdote that illustrated the racial dynamics of Jackson. She told the group about the racial segregation in churches. For her first five months there she attended a church with an almost exclusively white congregation. She inferred that she did not feel particularly comfortable there, impelling her to seek an alternative. She found a predominantly black church, with greater ethnic diversity. She told the group that she felt more comfortable there.

“After finishing study abroad, I came back to Aichi prefecture, where I was born and raised. Even though I should know well about my hometown, I did not know that Aichi has so many Brazilians, until I learned about minorities in the US and became interested in this topic. I decided to volunteer to help immigrants in my hometown. I knew that there were many foreign children who worked to earn money without compulsory education. So, I taught Japanese to immigrant

children, in Toyota in Olympia organisation, and supported their study. Being inspired by their earnest efforts, I came to think that I wanted to help them as my career.”

In the session, Ayuka lamented the working conditions of the immigrant workers and the situation of their children, in comparison to the Japanese employees. She explained to the group that the Brazilian workers laboured in the factories under dangerous working conditions and were the first to face redundancy in times of economic hardship. Adding to their vulnerability, their environment (working in isolation from Japanese people) is not conducive to learning the Japanese language, which leaves them unable to work elsewhere. Furthermore, to the shock of the other members, their children are not required by law to attend school, and since in most cases they were unable to speak Japanese, they tended to work in the factories instead. All members of the group were shocked to hear that child labour occurs in Japan.

“These are my current academic interests [see screen 13 of the MN]. Although I was interested in peace building in countries, like developing countries and the Middle East, through study abroad, I shifted my focus to minorities in Japan, especially the experiences of immigrants. I also changed the topic for [my] graduation thesis from American foreign policy toward Israel to paths of immigrant children in Japan. Because I love my hometown, I want to contribute to helping immigrants around Aichi Prefecture, where the Japanese Brazilian population is concentrated. It is interesting that my learning experiences at NLAU made me pay attention to local issues, as well as global issues. Now I want to study more about immigration at graduate school. In the future, I want to work to support immigrants in my hometown.”

In sum, the narrative was primarily focused on the development of Ayuka’s academic interests, which moved through three distinct phases: an interest English studies, and in poverty and developing countries; on to international relations and the Israel-Palestine conflict; and she finally settled on immigration and minority communities. In the next subsection, I address the non-linguistic elements of the MN.



#### *4.2.1.2 Analysis of the non-textual elements (will shorten this, I think)*

Speaking holistically, the images that accompanied the linguistic component, I felt, helped to personalise the narrative and provided a more tangible element: they helped to bring Ayuka's experiences to life. In addition, closer analysis of the images, using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework, aspects of the message were revealed that were not apparent in the linguistic component. In this subsection, I summarise these before detailing my reservations about drawing anything more than tentative conclusions from these images.

If we view the images as a representation of the relationship between the photographer and the subject of the photograph, (tentative) conclusions can be drawn on the relationship between the producer of the MN (Ayuka in this case) and what is being depicted in the images. What became apparent through analysing Ayuka's images was that the way she represented the objects of the images, and perhaps also the way she thought about them, changed in each of the three phases of her academic journey. The images of the first phase suggested a heavy interpersonal emphasis, those of the second phase conveyed a sense of isolation and loneliness that was not apparent in the words that she used to speak of this phase, and the images of the final phase were more detached and objective, which could be interpreted as signifying a more analytical way of thinking.

In the first phase, which included her time in EAP, her trip to the orphanage in Vietnam and the Israel-Palestine conflict student conference, Ayuka represents herself as happy and integrated in all social domains. In all pictures, she is smiling at the camera and performing a V-sign with her fingers (a ubiquitous pose in Japan, ostensibly a symbol of



Figure 3. The group who volunteered at the orphanage in Vietnam

happiness), from a position within a unified group. Photos in this phase provide insights into social dynamics. For instance, the image in figure 3 is an unstructured analytical process that represents the social dimension of her experience at the orphanage in Vietnam. Participants of the image are the fellow volunteers and who I assume to be one of the orphans, and the way that they are arranged may signify some of the social dynamics within the group: the five female students on the left are leaning together, forming the most cohesive group within the larger group; the male student is standing behind and fades into the background; and, Ayuka forms a separate group with the orphan boy, who is leaning against her, breaking from the main pattern in which all members lean to the centre. This last point seems significant because it suggests that the boy trusts her the most, meaning that there is a history of Ayuka investing time and energy building this trust. The photograph is, in part, a representation of Ayuka's

commitment to the work of helping the orphans in the orphanage and it highlights the social dimension of this experience that is typical of this phase of her academic trajectory.

The second phase, in contrast showed very little of the social dimension of the



Figure 4. Images that represent Ayuka's study abroad.

experience. As can be seen in figure 4, aligning with what she said about the social challenges that she encountered while on study abroad, there are none of the more intimate photos that characterised earlier phases in her learning. Adding to the impression of a diminished social life, of the six images used, apart from the class photo on the top-right, the images depicted the university buildings and facilities, which are entirely devoid of people, giving a sense of loneliness that was not expressed in words.

With regards to the phase of Ayuka's academic trajectory that focused on interest in minorities in Japan, there was a further shift in representational style, which is exemplified in the images of her experience volunteering at the Toyota plant. Although from her commentary it is clear that interpersonal relations with the children inspired her, in comparison to her experience volunteering at the orphanage in Vietnam, the way that she represented her work at the Toyota factory was more detached and objective in

its orientation (see figure 5). None of the people in any of the images gaze at the camera, and instead offer the viewer an objective, dispassionate insight into the kinds of activities involved in her work. Adding to this sense of detachment, the photographs were taken at an oblique horizontal angle, offering the viewer a subjective, yet detached relationship with the subject matter. Perhaps most significantly, Ayuka is not placed in any of the photographs. Removing herself from the story gives the viewer generalised information about the experience, giving a more objective impression.



Figure 5. Images representing Ayuka's time volunteering at the Toyota plant.

While I believe interpretation of the images offers valuable insights into Ayuka's experiences, I am tentative in the conclusions I draw from the images because she was limited to using the photographs she had already taken: they were not taken with the purpose of creating this MN in mind. It is possible, for instance, that group portraits, such as those included in the earlier phases of the narrative were simply a part of freshman culture, and once this phase was completed the taking of such photographs ceased. Nevertheless, even if this is the case, Ayuka was influenced by this cultural shift, which appears to accompany a shift towards a more objective way of representing the world (which is arguably the primary goal of higher education). Furthermore, in the case of the depiction of her experience at Toyota, she did portray a social gathering (what looked like a potluck event), but she made a decision to focus on the food, rather



than the people. I acknowledge that this decision could have been made either in the taking of the photograph, or in the selection of images for representation. If it was a decision made in the taking of the photograph, was it due to a desire to emphasise the food, or feeling inhibited by the social context? Either way, the social dimension of the experience is diminished. If it had been a representational decision, a conscious decision was made to background the social aspects. Therefore, regardless of when the decision was made and why, the result is a socially detached representation of her experience, strengthening the impression of objectivity.

#### 4.2.1.3 Overview of the inquiry group's analysis

This phase of the inquiry process led to conversations which although inspired by the MNs digressed significantly. Therefore, I provide only an overview of the analysis as it relates specifically to the MN in question and I return to other aspects of the conversations in the Meta-Analysis and Synthesis chapter, Chapter 6.

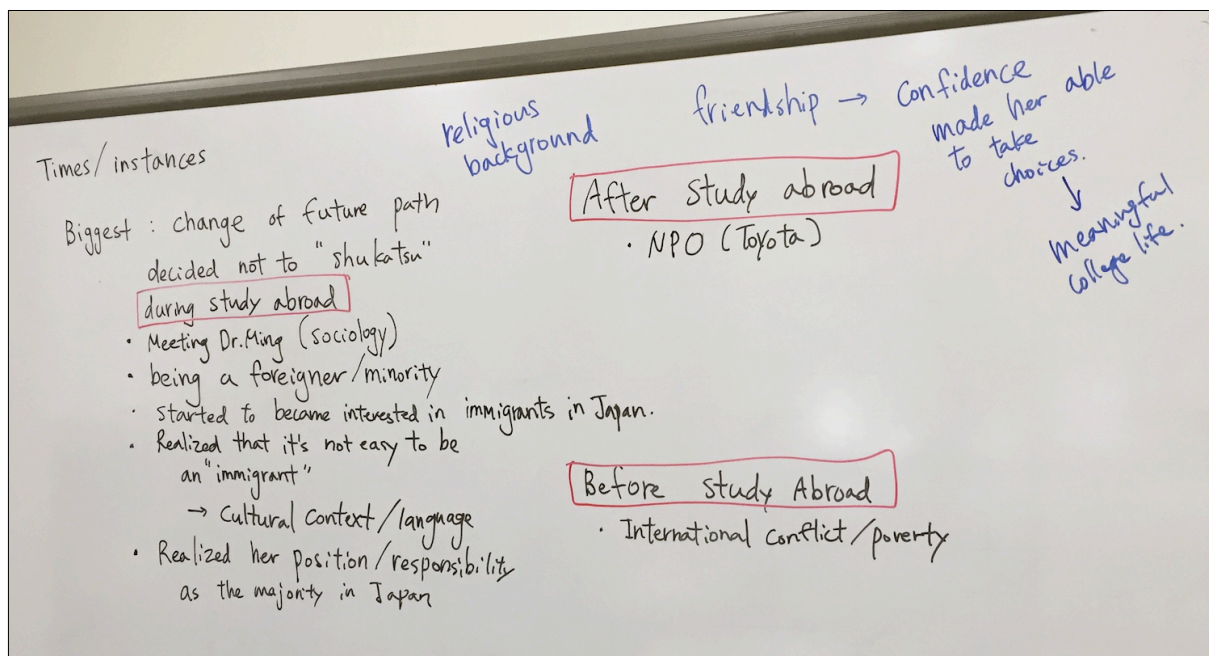


Figure 5. Outcome of the inquiry group's NA, written on the whiteboard

Figure 5 represents the inquiry group's efforts to identify, in their analysis of Ayuka's MN, instances where she took control over her learning. As they saw it, the "biggest"

instance of this was changing her plan for after her graduation from NLAU, from the typical “shukatsu” (jobhunting) to pursuing a graduate education. They identified her experiences while on study abroad as the cause of this. They also saw her religious background as influential, and her friendships as giving her the confidence to make those choices and make her life at NLAU meaningful.

#### *4.2.1.4 Commentary from the perspective of learner autonomy*

The narrative was primarily focused on the development of Ayuka’s academic interests, which culminated in a well-defined life goal. Although her academic interests moved through three distinct phases - an interest in poverty and developing countries, international relations and the Israel-Palestine conflict, and immigration and minority communities - as one member of the inquiry group pointed out, all phases were grounded in her desire to help the vulnerable and the oppressed. This would appear to be one of Ayuka’s core values and, considering her frequent references to Christianity, probably derives from her sociohistorical constitution. Driven by this core value, Ayuka sought out activities and engaged in communities that were focused on ameliorating the world’s problems: poverty, ethnic conflict and the alienation of immigrants. This could be considered a manifestation of her learner autonomy in two ways. Firstly, in reference to Sneddon’s (2013) philosophy of personal autonomy, by making and acting upon choices on the basis of her values she is self-shaping (the question of whether she chose these values is a question that will be taken up later). And second, by participating in those communities and their activities, Ayuka was constructing her identity on her own terms, which is an example of learner autonomy as conceived from the perspective of Situated Learning Theory (Toohey and Norton, 2003).

Ayuka was not, however, in control of her identity at all times. The year she spent in Jackson, Mississippi for her study abroad epitomised what Block (2007: 20–21) terms “critical experiences”: periods in one’s life in which any sense of a stable identity that one might have had is upset, prompting a struggle to find balance and transformation of one’s identity. Critical experiences commonly arise, Block (2007) points out, when an individual crosses geographical and sociocultural borders. Indeed, Ayuka felt unable to

successfully participate in the sociocultural context she found in her university in Jackson: “Not only my English was bad, but also, I did not know how I could join in conversation with American friends”, she said. This was a stark contrast to the central place she enjoyed in the communities prior to her study abroad, as represented in the images of her smiling from the centre of a group of friends in her MN. One way in which she reconciled this situation was to use her Japanese national identity to explain her difficulties: “I was the only Japanese at school and I thought I was different from others” and “[h]ow they communicate was different from how Japanese do”, for instance. This enabled her to identify as an excluded immigrant minority – “I realised that being an immigrant was not simple”, she said. In acknowledging this position, she was able to identify with other excluded minorities, evidenced by her change of church from a predominantly white church, in which she felt unwelcome, to a predominantly black but ethnically diverse church, which she found more welcoming. Although the manner in which she did it differed, Ayuka’s use of her Japanese national identity as a resource in navigating difficulties presented by her new sociocultural context echoes that of Naoko, the wife of the Japanese diplomat, documented by Carter (2017). Through Ayuka’s struggles, she was able to regain control over her identity, a further manifestation of her learner autonomy.

What is salient in Ayuka’s MN is the role that knowledge played in her efforts to restabilise her identity. She demonstrated self-knowledge in choosing and acting on the basis of her values, but it where it became crucial to her identity was in the critical experience of her study abroad. As Mercer (1990: 43) points out, “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by doubt and uncertainty”. The doubt and uncertainty that Ayuka was experiencing and the struggle for balance made her particularly amenable to what she was learning in her sociology classes. The concepts and theories that she was learning offered sociological explanations for what she was experiencing psychologically. This led to increased knowledge of her social self (Meyers, 2005). Since knowledge of the self – as the source of our motivations – underpins our autonomy, increased knowledge of the social self suggests greater autonomy, which is evidenced in the way that it enabled her to regain control over her identity. It is clear in the case of Ayuka that increasing her knowledge of the world led to an increase in her knowledge of herself. This aligns with

Sneddon's (2013) assertion that since we are always in the world, to know our selves we also need knowledge of the world. Such knowledge, however, must be made egocentric – related to the self – in order to enhance one's autonomy. Ayuka's suffering outside the classroom prompted her to relate theories relating to immigration, minorities and race to her own situation and enabling her to see her place in the world from a sociological perspective; she thus gained egocentric knowledge of the world around her. The increased objectivity in the way that she represented her experiences from her study abroad onwards coincides with the development of Ayuka's ability to reify her situation, as it was evidenced here.

On returning to her hometown, the increased self-knowledge and her new-found sympathy with immigrants gained through her study abroad experience, along with her core values and her love of her hometown, enabled her to define her life plan: to help the children of immigrants in her hometown. The steps she then took towards realising this plan constitute an strong instance of self-direction. In terms of the emotional conditions that supported Ayuka's autonomous trajectory, she referred to the key role played by the friends she made in the early stages of her time at NLAU. In sum, perhaps we could say that Ayuka's learner autonomy manifested in the active construction of her identity in accordance with her core values, in a manner that became increasingly self-conscious as a result of her critical experiences and egocentric sociological knowledge.



# WHO IS IN CONTROL?

Exploring Control over Learning in NLAU

Boost your **ACADEMIC** and **CREATIVE CV**, with:

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**  
**NARRATIVE INQUIRY**  
**ETHNOGRAPHY**  
**MULTIMODAL EXPRESSION**  
**DIGITAL MEDIA**

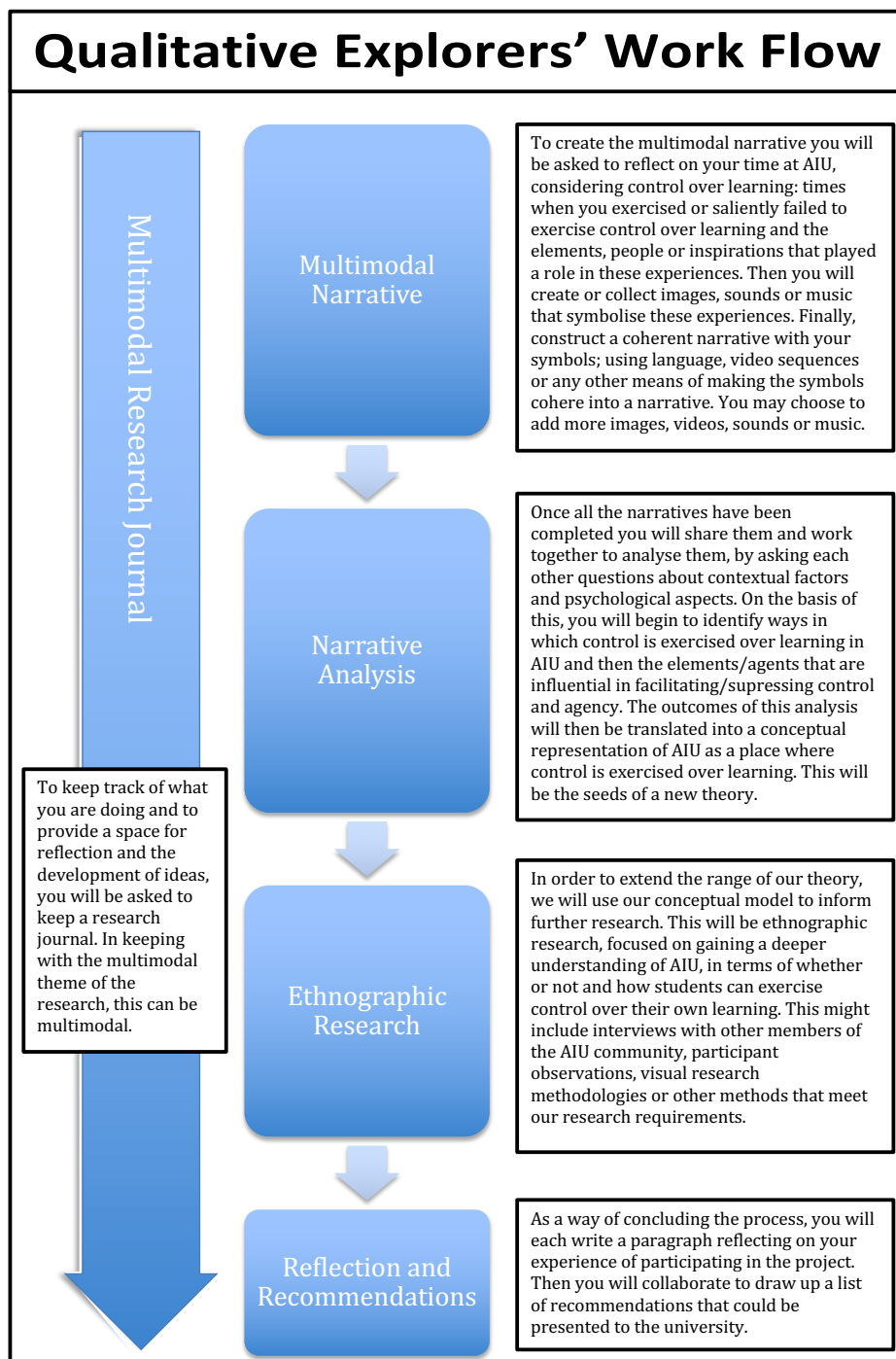
**I'm interested in YOUR experience as a student at AIU**

If you are a **DEGREE-SEEKING STUDENT** and have **COMPLETED YOUR STUDY ABROAD**, you are eligible to join the **QUALITATIVE EXPLORERS** group. We will **meet 6 to 8 times** over the **SPRING semester** to learn about and carry out qualitative ethnographic research. You will be **CO-RESEARCHERS**, who are involved in making decisions about the research process.

If you are interested in becoming a **QUALITATIVE EXPLORER**, contact **Joe Sykes**, AIU Lecturer and doctoral student, at:

**[joesykes@aiu.ac.jp](mailto:joesykes@aiu.ac.jp)**

## Appendix 3.9 – Explanation of the workflow provided to the newly recruited inquiry group members



# Qualitative Explorers

## Exploring Control over Learning in NLAU

Joe Sykes

## Information and Consent

This leaflet provides an overview of the project, including: time and work information; prerequisites; benefits to the participants; intended outcomes of the project; rights of the participants; information about the principle researcher; and request for consent.

### What are qualitative explorers?

Qualitative Explorers are a **research group**, consisting of the principle researcher, **Joe Sykes**, and **student co-researchers**. The group will learn about and carry out **qualitative research methodologies**, in order to **explore NLAU as a place where students exercise control over their own learning**. As co-researchers, participants will play an active role in the research, making collaborative decisions about the research process.

### Who is Joe Sykes?

Joe Sykes is an EAP Lecturer at NLAU and PhD student at the University of Westminster in the UK. He has carried out research in the area of learner beliefs and learner autonomy. His doctoral supervisor is Professor Terry Lamb, at the University of Westminster.

## What will the Qualitative Explorers do?

Qualitative Explorers will:

- Meet **6 to 8 times** throughout the **spring semester** and carry out some research between meetings (details of the schedule and work carried out is **negotiable** and will be decided within the group).
- **Reflect on their experience at the university**, in relation to control over learning, and represent it creatively, not only in language, but also artistically, using a variety of media, including digital media, in the form of a **multimodal narrative**.
- Use **ethnographic research** methodologies to explore the context of NLAU.

## What are the benefits to you?

By participating in this project you would gain the following skills and experience (which you could add to your CV/Resume):

- **Teamwork**
- Conducting **qualitative research**
- **Multimodal expression**
- **Digital image and video editing**

## What are the intended outcomes of the project?

- Data for my doctoral research
- Evidence based recommendations to inform university policy
- A website to display the work of the group
- Publication of journal articles, book chapters and, perhaps, a book

## What are your rights?

- You are **free to decide not to join this project** and would be **free to leave the project at any time**, if you do decide to join.
- The resulting data will not be shared with any third party without the permission of the participant.
- You retain the right to see the final product of the research, such as the doctoral thesis, journal articles, websites etc.
- If you decide you want to remain **anonymous**, every measure will be taken to ensure that your identity will be protected (such as using pseudonyms in place of real names, removing images or videos and personal information that may disclose your identity).

#### ALTERNATIVELY

- If you would prefer to be **publically recognised** for your work – by having your name published along with the research, in journals, books or websites – this is also your right. It may be that you would like some information to be made public and some to remain confidential. This could be **decided through discussion**.

### What are the principle researcher's rights?

- Once informed consent has been given, the principle researcher will take **ownership of the resultant data** and will use it in accordance with the conditions agreed with the participants, with reference to the degree of anonymity stipulated below. Any use that does not correspond with these conditions will require further consent.
- Since the principle researcher bears ultimate responsibility for the impact of the project and decisions made therein, he retains the **power of veto**, to be exercised if the risk of negatively impacting any of the stakeholders is deemed to be too great.

### Request for Consent

Please read the statements below, check if you agree.

☐ I would like to remain anonymous

**OR**

☐ I would like my real name and other materials that could reveal my identity to be used in the dissemination of the research, to be recognized publicly for the work that I do

☐ I have had an opportunity to read and understand all the terms and conditions stipulated within this document. I have had a chance to questions and my questions (if there were any) were thoroughly answered.

☐ I have no objection to our meetings being audio recorded (for reference only; if the data were to be used for any other purpose, further consent would be required)

☐ I have no objection to our meetings being video recorded (for reference only; if the data were to be used for any other purpose, further consent would be required)

I hereby agree to participate in this research of my own free will, within the conditions stipulated in this document.

Name (signature) \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship with the researcher:

☐ Currently a student in his class

☐ Former student

☐ No professional relationship prior to hearing about the project

Contact information (email or phone number) \_\_\_\_\_

DATE:DD/MM/YY) \_\_\_\_\_

### *Appendix 3.11 – A brief description of the inquiry group members*

#### **Ayuka Umeda:**

At the time of the inquiry, Ayuka was in her fourth and senior year at NLAU, having completed her study abroad in the US. She had taken the conventional path of coming to NLAU immediately after graduating from a Japanese high school, in Aichi Prefecture, where she had lived her whole life up until that point. She participated in the inquiry as part of her course work for the social sciences methodology course she was taking that semester, which she hoped would help prepare her for graduate school.

#### **Arisa Ibe:**

Arisa, at the time of the inquiry, was also in her fourth and senior year at NLAU, having completed her study abroad in Norway. She had also followed the conventional route of coming to NLAU immediately after graduating from a Japanese high school, in Yokohama, where she had lived her whole life up until that point. She also participated in the inquiry as part of her course work for the social sciences methodology course she was taking that semester, which she hoped would help prepare her for graduate school.

#### **Yamato Tomioka:**

Yamato was, at the time of the inquiry, in his second and junior year, prior to embarking on his study abroad. Like Ayuka and Arisa, he had followed the typical path of coming to NLAU immediately after graduating from a Japanese high school, in his hometown (the exact location did not emerge as significant in the inquiry), where he had lived his whole life up until that point. He also participated in the inquiry as part of his course work for the social sciences methodology course he was taking that semester. Yamato was also considering going to graduate school after graduating from NLAU.

#### **Akari Kurata:**

Akari was in her fifth year as an NLAU student, at the time of the inquiry, but was yet to embark on her study abroad, due to various issues that are described in Chapter 4. As a mature student, her route to NLAU was not typical; she had already attended a two-year college, in Nara, her hometown, and had worked for a number of years, but she decided to attend NLAU as a step in her life plan of becoming a peace studies researcher. She





*Appendix 4.2 – Comprehensive analysis of Yuko’s MN using Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)*



I interpret the image (see figure ) to be an unstructured analytical process, comprising of five embedded processes that constitute possessive attributes, while

the carrier is the affective dimension of Yuko's life at NLAU. I will first present my analysis of the image as a whole and each possessive attribute will be dealt with in detail later. In terms of interactive processes, there is no gaze from any of the participants, making it an offer, an offer of a glimpse into some of the affective forces at play in Yuko's life at NLAU, giving an impression of objectivity. The image is saliently abstract and symbolic, a fact that is emphasised by the modality markers, such as the use of coloured pencils and naturalistically impossible composition; the image has high modality within an abstract coding orientation. The image uses a combination of circular and vertically polarised compositional processes. The large head in the centre (which represents Yuko as an NLAU student), forming the nucleus around which all other possessive attributes revolve, positions Yuko as the subject of all the affective processes depicted. My initial interpretation of the vertical polarisation was that the images at the top of the image represented the positive aspects of her affective experience, and those at the bottom the negative; however, during the session, Yuko said that she thought that the top signified phenomena that is external to her and those at the bottom internal. She said that she feels her circumstances are positive, but things inside of her always threaten undermine her efforts to achieve her goals.

I divided the image into five embedded processes that constitute the possessive attributes, making up the unstructured analytical process of the whole image (see image... ). I deal with them individually, numbering them to correspond with the numbers in the image, before discussing the way that some of them interact.

1. This possessive attribute forms a unidirectional transactional action. The figure at the desk is the actor. The projector screen showing a globe surrounded by a crowd of laughing heads is the goal. A vector points from the figure's eyeball (which constitutes her whole head) to the screen. The globe may signify of much of what Yuko is learning at NLAU, considering the 'global' focus of the much of the curriculum. When speaking of this part of the image, Yuko stated that she often felt forced to be optimistic about the future and her career, which may explain the laughing heads. A related statement that Yuko made about this part of the image was that she felt like she was being brainwashed at times. The eyeball head may signify this. It is a head that has no other function other than to see what is in front of it. There is no space for a brain and it has no other

sensing organs. Furthermore, the lack of eyelid brings to mind the scene of Stanley Kubric's *A Clockwork Orange*, in which the eyes of Alex, the protagonist and anti-hero, are held open by a contraption, effectively forcing him to watch the film being projected onto the screen in front of him. That the figure is alone in the classroom may signify the knowledge transmission aspects of her learning. Taken as a whole, the image may represent Yuko's experience of classroom learning at NLAU, to which she is dedicated but somewhat critical.

2. This possessive attribute is an unstructured analytical process. The (implied) carrier is academic learning. The owl, Yuko confirmed, signifies wisdom. The sun and the phases of the moon may represent the passing of time and the round-the-clock study culture of NLAU. The curved bookshelves and the forest view from the windows bare a similarity to and clearly signify the NLAU library, which is open 24hours, reinforcing impression of round-the-clock study. The staircase leading from the bookshelf to the sun signifies that reading/studying is the way to advance to a bright future. The small black figure looking out of the window may signify the hours of contemplation involved in her learning. In essence this possessive attribute represents the hard work spent studying in order to progress and gain wisdom.
3. This possessive attribute is a narrative process, but it doesn't neatly fit into any of those outlined in Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The effect of downward momentum is created by the tumbling of books and money into a spiral at the bottom. The black figure and the white figure are clinging to each other (an embedded bidirectional transactional action) as if to prevent the black figure from falling. Considering the laws of gravity and that the figure is suspended over a void creates a vector pointing from the black figure to the bottom of the spiral. I would also argue that oppositional force applied against the gravitational pull forms a vector pointing in the opposite direction, giving the impression that the intentionality of the figures is directed towards the top half of the scene. The top half of the image depicts an idyllic vista (symbolised by light green mountains, falling stars, pink raindrops and flowing rainbows) where the black figure wants to go. There is a small blue bubble with what I presume to be a carp and a small red car; these are both symbols of boyhood in Japan (the 'koinobori' or 'carp flag' is hung outside houses to celebrate 'Boy's Day' in Japan and I think it is uncontroversial to say that the toy car is a

universal expression of boyhood). Considering its place in the idyllic section and Yuko's homosexuality, perhaps she wishes she were male, or perhaps it signifies that being male makes it easier to live the idyllic life. The tumbling books and money falling into an abyss may signify the burdensome cost of her education, and the black figure is only avoiding falling into it through the support of the white figure and coffee (signified by the white coffee cup). This would seem to signify Yuko striving towards a bright future against the forces of fatigue and financial pressures that are pulling her down; but she is able to resist with the emotional support of her partner and the physical effects of caffeine. With regards the significance of why the black figure has octopus tentacles in place of legs, octopods are commonly depicted in Japanese folklore and modern manga. In Hokusai's 'Dream of the Fisherman's Wife' an octopus performs cunnilingus on a woman, which she appears to enjoy. In contrast to this mutually pleasurable interaction, modern manga's 'tentacle erotica' such sexual interaction is usually forced by the octopus (Briel, 2010). When asked about her use of tentacles, Yuko said that it was because they were "not pleasant" and "gross". The insights taken from Japanese visual culture and Yuko comments taken together suggest a negative self-image and a sexual connection with the white figure that is, considering the embrace, mutual. The floor of the classroom (possessive attribute 1) is flowing like water into the idyllic scene of this possessive attribute. This signifies the connection between the two narrative processes – i.e. the reason she studies is to reach the idyllic future – and, according to our conversations, the flowing water also represents the "fountain of knowledge". Taken as a whole, I take this possessive attribute to be an abstract representation of Yuko's aspirations, what she hopes to gain through her education, and her struggles to achieve them.

4. As discussed above, the large head forms the nucleus for the whole image, but it also forms the goal of a unidirectional transactional action (see possessive attribute 5), connected to the actors – the black figure with big hands and the staring blue faces – by vectors. The vector between the black figure and the head are created by the reaching hands and between the blue faces and the head by the eyes of the blue faces. The large head is an embedded unstructured analytical process. The graduation hat suggests that the head depicts Yuko on graduation day, having completed her studies. Its smile and closed eyes evince

a facial expression that is serene and Buddha like. The patterns on its cranium - black and white patterns on the left and soft shapes in pastel colours on the right - signify the conflicting thoughts: dark and swirling on the left and pleasant on the right. The position of the black figure and the blue faces is low in relation to the large head, signifying a lower power position. The blue faces are (literally) looking up at the head and the black figure appears to be reaching up in salutation. This could signify the respect from others and the peace of mind that she hopes to gain once she graduates (an alternative interpretation for the blue faces could be the sense of being watched by others that everyone speaks of in NLAU). This component of the image gives us more clues as to Yuko's motivation: she hopes to gain inner peace and respect from others through her education.

5. This part of the picture Yuko confirmed to be an adaptation of Akutagawa's short story, "The Spider's Thread", in which Shakyamuni (the king of Gokuraku [Heaven]) is looking down into a clear pond at the depths of Jigoku (Hell) at a man called Kandata who was condemned for a lesser crime. Shakyamuni decided to give him a chance to climb up to heaven by dropping down a spider's thread for him to climb up, but Kandata is self-serving and attempts to climb up by himself. Others see him and decide to climb up behind him, making the thread break so they all fall back down into hell. The moral of the story is that Kanadata fell back down because he only thought of his own salvation. The lotus blossoms signify Buddhism, the reaching black figure signifies Kandata climbing the thread alone, the owl is Shakyamuni and the black pattern with the laughing mouth at the bottom, hell. Yuko confirmed in the session that the hellish bottom half of the picture represents her family; more details of this will be provided in the next section. I interpret the totality of the this possessive attribute to signify the tenuousness of Yuko's upward trajectory and perhaps the interdependence that is necessary to reach out of her dark situation, which she associates with her family background.

Taken as a whole, this image gives a nuanced representation of the psychosocial tensions that underlie Yuko's trajectory through NLAU. During the session, she commented that through drawing this picture, she realised that her circumstances were positive and all obstacles relate to her psychology; in particular, feelings of



inferiority that are rooted in family and financial issues. She sees education as a way of escaping these feelings.

## Appendix 5.1 – Sample interview schedule and notes used by Group 1's Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry

Date: 6/29/2017  
Hour: 20:30 to 20:45.

INT240 Qualitative Research Interview Paper

Type of student:  
Interviewer: JAPAN STUDENT

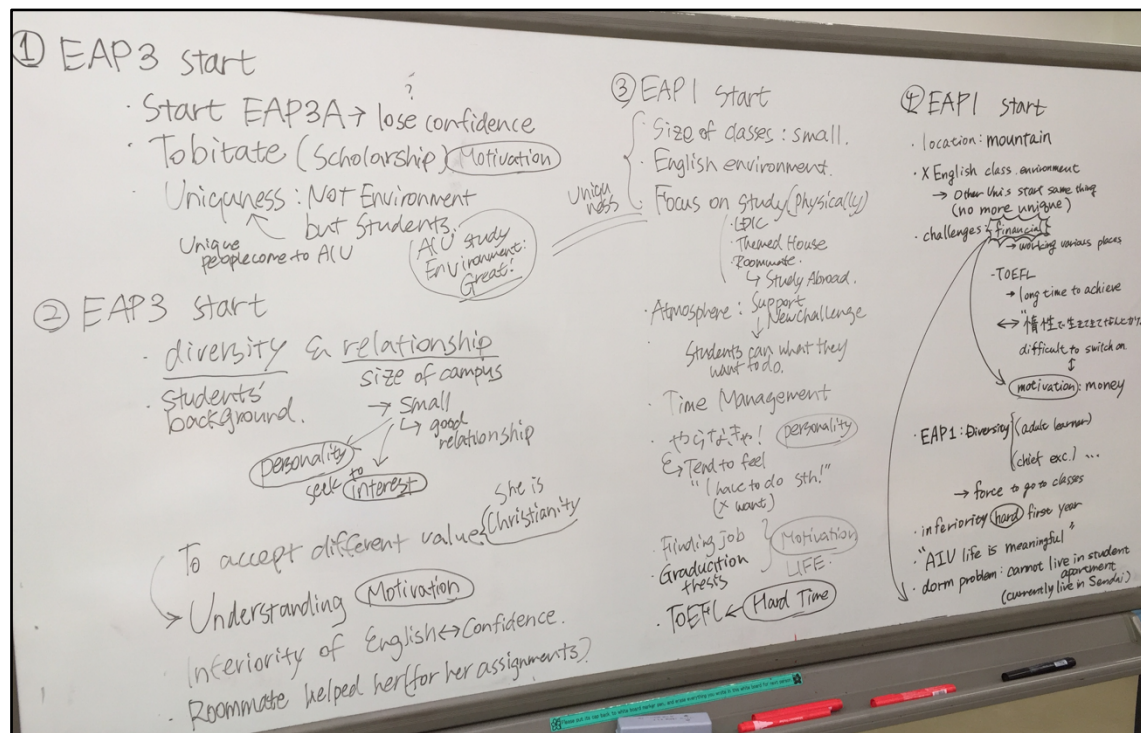
① AIU のどんな点がユニークだと思えますか  
英語を授業している。  
・学校側は  
・日本人学生が多様。

② クラス内外で困難はありましたか? → どのように対処しましたか?  
タイムマネジメント  
・多分早くもエンゲ  
・やるべきこと  
・英語はなせなかった。  
① 英語のリスニングは  
② コミュニケーション  
③ 自己の個性を英語で表現する。  
④ 英語でコミュニケーションになること、やる気をなくさせることはあ  
なんでしたか?  
・将来に役立つこと = 英語 + コミュニケーション能力  
・これは。

⑤ どのような場面でもどんな言語を使うか教えてください。→ 考えてい  
上でフラストラーションを感じることはありますか?  
・日 + 英語 + フラッシュカード  
⑥ PPT プレゼンテーション  
⑦ 自分自身で英語で考えよう! → いろいろ増  
⑧ AIU の環境全体についてどう思いますか? → 授業は必要。  
・設備。(国はかん) / インターネット / 学力  
・X けど 1C かな  
・自入したい / ゲーム / プログラミング  
・多様性があると思う。色んな話 ability + a → 英語がたのしみ!  
⑨ AIU を卒業してから心配、気がかりなことはありますか?  
・特にない。  
・卒業してから心配しないために、高校から。  
・(1) 就職先がある? → ない。自分自身で考えよう。  
・世界などにはいることも考えていること。  
・(2) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(3) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(4) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(5) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(6) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(7) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(8) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(9) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(10) 英語でコミュニケーション。

① 自分の中にいる。  
・留学 / 英語 / 授業 → 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(1) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(2) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(3) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(4) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(5) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(6) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(7) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(8) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(9) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(10) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(11) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(12) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(13) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(14) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(15) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(16) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(17) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(18) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(19) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(20) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(21) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
・(22) 英語でコミュニケーション。  
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## Appendix 5.2: Example of interview analysis for Group 1's Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry



## Appendix 5.3: Overview of Group 1's Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry

### Data

Interviewee category and (interviewer)	1) EAP3 starter no.1 (Yamato)	2) EAP3 starter no.2 (Arisa)	3) EAP1 starter no.1 (Arisa)
<b>Do you think NLAU is unique?</b>	Yes. The personalities of students who come to NLAU are different from other university students. They are more outgoing.	Yes. The diversity of the student body. There are students from many different backgrounds.	Yes. The English medium environment, small class sizes and the environment that is geared towards studying.
<b>Did you have any difficulties in or out of class? If so, how did you cope with them?</b>	Yes. She entered the highest level EAP class and felt inferior to the other students who had lived abroad or had a non-Japanese parent. See below for how she coped with it.	Yes. She suffered a lack of confidence in her English, but her roommate, who was a more senior student, helped her with her assignments and she gradually gained confidence.	Yes. She struggled with time management and she was driven by a sense of obligation rather than motivated by things she wanted to do. She saw this as a personality trait. She also had a hard time achieving the requisite TOEFL score.
<b>What motivated or demotivated your learning in NLAU?</b>	Her part-time job as a representative for student financial aid organisation, which put her in contact with students from other universities and gave her "rhythm in her life" and something she felt in control of, which was motivating. Her academic life, in contrast, she felt was out of her control.	The diversity challenged her because she was a Christian and found that others didn't share her values. However, she found this a "really deep" experience because she was motivated to understand others and she became more open-minded and tolerant. This led her to reflect on who she was and seek new interests.	Because of the personality trait mentioned above, she was motivated by curricular requirements, such as TOEFL, Study Abroad requirements, graduation thesis and job hunting. She emphasised that these things motivated more than just her learning, but her life.
<b>Do you feel any frustration switching between languages?</b>	-	-	-
<b>What do you think about the environment of NLAU? (Here they emphasised that they had left this question open</b>	She thought it was great. She could focus on her studies without distraction – she felt no need for "pop culture".	The small size of the campus and community mean that maintaining good relationships requires the ability to understand the perspectives of others.	She thought it was an excellent environment for studying, being supportive and encouraging students to embrace new challenges. The isolated location helped, but also the facilities, such as the LDIC, the themed houses. She



and did not lead them with examples, etc.)			thought that because of this, students tried new things and increased confidence as a result.
Do you have any concerns or worries about life after NLAU?	-	-	-
Additional points		She felt that her most significant learning occurred through her relationships with diverse others.	

Interviewee category and (interviewer)	4) EAP1 Starter no.2 (and Super Senior) (Akari)	5) Super Senior no.1 (Akari)	6) Super Senior no.2 (Akari)
Do you think NLAU is unique?	Yes. The isolated location in the mountains.	Yes. The diversity of backgrounds and life goals of the Japanese students is unique, as is the English medium instruction.	Yes. The diversity of the students.
Did you have any difficulties in or out of class? If so, how did you cope with them?	Yes. It took a long time to achieve the requisite TOEFL, she had never had to struggle academically before this and it took a long time to adjust her mind-set. She felt inferior because of her English in the first year, but with the support of her classmates and roommates, who were from diverse backgrounds, she persevered. She had financial difficulties, she failed to get accommodation on campus after the first year and it was very expensive to live nearby so in the end she lived with her sister, 3 hours away. The combination of the time	Yes. He struggled with time-management because, on top of classes, he ran his own organisation that aims to revitalise the region; although this work also contributed to his English development because it was conducted primarily in English. He had also struggled with his English at first, but he took a two year leave of absence to work in a hotel in Hong Kong, through which his English improved and he also learned Chinese.	Yes. He managed his time badly, participating in six extracurricular clubs. As a result his grades suffered and his English did not improve, which made him feel inferior to others who seemed not suffer the same problems. His solution to this was to do a two-year internship in Germany. He had lived in Germany as a child, but had forgotten how to speak the language. During his internship, he relearned German and returned to NLAU with his self-esteem restored.

	taken to reach her TOEFL and the dorm problem meant she had to take several leaves of absence to make money to continue.		
<b>What motivated or demotivated your learning in NLAU?</b>	Money. She felt that money related to everything.		His peers who worked hard to produce excellent work motivated him: their presentations were excellent.
<b>Do you feel any frustration switching between languages?</b>	-	He used to, but not anymore.	He used to really struggle with English, but not anymore. In general he finds language acquisition hard.
<b>What do you think about the environment of NLAU? (Here they emphasised that they had left this question open and did not lead them with examples, etc.)</b>	The diversity of students helped her because there were older students who could assist her. The insufficient dormitory numbers was a problem that impacted her.	He thought the 24-hour facilities were good because he runs his own stock trading business and YouTube advertising business, so it gave him flexibility in balancing work with study.	He thought that NLAU facilitated communication within the university well – there were many places to sit and chat. However, he thought that NLAU should provide more opportunities to communicate with people in other cities. This was left to the students and realistically this is difficult, due NLAU's isolated location.
<b>Do you have any concerns or worries about life after NLAU?</b>	-	No because he is well prepared, already owning two businesses.	Yes, for the future of NLAU itself because it was reported that the institution was having financial difficulties.
<b>Additional points</b>	She felt that NLAU life was meaningful		

Interviewee category and (interviewer)	7) Mature Student (Akari)	8) International Degree-Seeking Student no. 1 (Akari)
<b>Do you think NLAU is unique?</b>	Yes. He thought the uniqueness of NLAU lay in the English medium instruction, the 24-hour library and the fact that there is no security gate (as there are in most Japanese universities).	It was the English medium instruction that brought him to NLAU, but he also thought that the liberal arts curriculum and the study abroad programme were good features of NLAU.
<b>Did you have any difficulties in or out of class? If so, how did you cope with them?</b>	As a thirty-year old he is concerned with avoiding being a negative influence on the younger students.	Yes. Being Korean and having limited Japanese language skills at first, it was difficult make friends among the Japanese students and to communicate with people in the community. As the first male full-time South Korean student, he had no Korean seniors to rely on and he felt pressure to set a good example. He initially relied on Korean exchange students for a social life. It is also difficult for him to find a job in Japan.
<b>What motivated or demotivated your learning in NLAU?</b>	He is motivated to learn for its own sake when something in the NLAU curriculum interests him, leading him to study independently. This stands in contrast to his previous study at a university in Japan where he focused only on American football and when he pursued graduate studies in economics abroad. He says he struggles to express himself spontaneously, so he believes preparation is key. He applied this to debate club by increasing his general knowledge by watching TED talks.	He completed his military service before entering NLAU, but he is keen to avoid the military camps that he is obliged to do if he returns to Korea. This motivates him to stay in NLAU throughout the holidays, too. He is motivated to study to increase his chances of getting a job in Japan. Other motivations are to be able to communicate in Japanese with people in the community and to show his gratitude to his parents. He does not want to regret his time at NLAU.
<b>Do you feel any frustration switching between languages?</b>	Initially, it took him time to get used to using casual English, as opposed to the formal English that he had learned in Japanese schools.	He finds it a challenge to switch between English, Korean and Japanese.
<b>What do you think about the environment of</b>	Being from a rural part of Hyogo, he loved the rural setting of NLAU. He was able to pursue his outdoor interests such as fishing. He also liked the library and other facilities. However,	He likes the natural environment around the NLAU campus, but he finds its isolation “super inconvenient” and drunk students are “sooo noisy” at night.

<b>NLAU? (Here they emphasised that they had left this question open and did not lead them with examples, etc.)</b>	he was unimpressed by many of the administration staff, who he felt were incompetent.	
<b>Do you have any concerns or worries about life after NLAU?</b>	He is concerned for NLAU's future as an institution.	He is worried about not getting a job in Japan.
<b>Additional points</b>	-	-

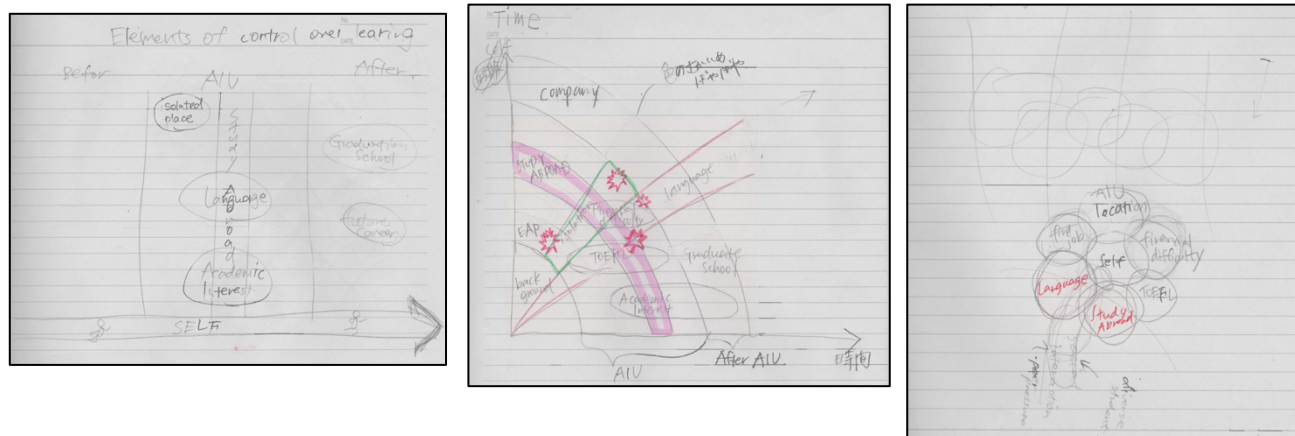
<b>Interviewee category and (interviewer)</b>	<b>9) Bridge Student no. 1 (Akari)</b>	<b>10) Bridge Student no. 2 (Ayuka)</b>
<b>Do you think NLAU is unique?</b>	She thought that the study abroad system, the international environment and the diversity of backgrounds of students were unique.	He thought the fact that the university is new made it more flexible and free from convention than most in Japan, meaning it is agile in responding to challenges.
<b>Did you have any difficulties in or out of class? If so, how did you cope with them?</b>	She felt isolated from the other Japanese students because they didn't speak out in class, whereas she did, having spent 8 years of her childhood in the US. However, she has now accepted that this is her style and she is happy behaving in the way that she wants to. Nevertheless, because she is ethnically Japanese she feels pressure to <i>be</i> Japanese and speak perfect Japanese (unlike her classmates with mixed roots), but she struggles with	He finds it hard to live up to the demands of social and academic life in NLAU; he is less outgoing than he feels is required of students. For example, he was the manager of the soft baseball club and his introversion made managing the members difficult. In addition, he had never struggled with his English so he thought he was good at learning languages, but when he took French, he experienced great difficulties, leading him to lose some confidence.

	formal Japanese language and she tends to unconsciously switch between Japanese and English.	
<b>What motivated or demotivated your learning in NLAU?</b>	She is motivated to get A grades in her classes, which is difficult, despite being a Bridge student.	He liked the obscure etiquette of the Kanto club. Although it took time to get used to, he was comfortable in this environment. He had lived America as a child so this was very interesting to him. In general, he tried to find something he was curious about in each class, but he was demotivated by the mathematics required of the business courses and also art.
<b>Do you feel any frustration switching between languages?</b>	No. She is most comfortable in a bilingual environment.	Yes. He still has to think about the right word to use and he finds translation hard, even though he was in the Bridge programme. He is fluent in English and Japanese, though. Interestingly, he feels he adopts different personalities when he switches between languages – motivated and passionate in English and calm and reserved in Japanese.
<b>What do you think about the environment of NLAU? (Here they emphasised that they had left this question open and did not lead them with examples, etc.)</b>	She feels comfortable that everyone is able to switch between Japanese and English.	He thought that NLAU students were proactive, strong and independent. He thought the small community was important and he liked the close relationship between faculty and students. He also likes the quiet calm of the campus, which leaves him free of distractions to concentrate on his studies. Although he does acknowledge that it is inconvenient.
<b>Do you have any concerns or worries about life after NLAU?</b>	She is worried that her imperfect Japanese language skills might put her at a disadvantage for job-hunting. She feels that people don't make allowances, despite her time spent abroad, because she looks Japanese.	He is concerned for NLAU's future as an institution.
<b>Additional points</b>	-	-

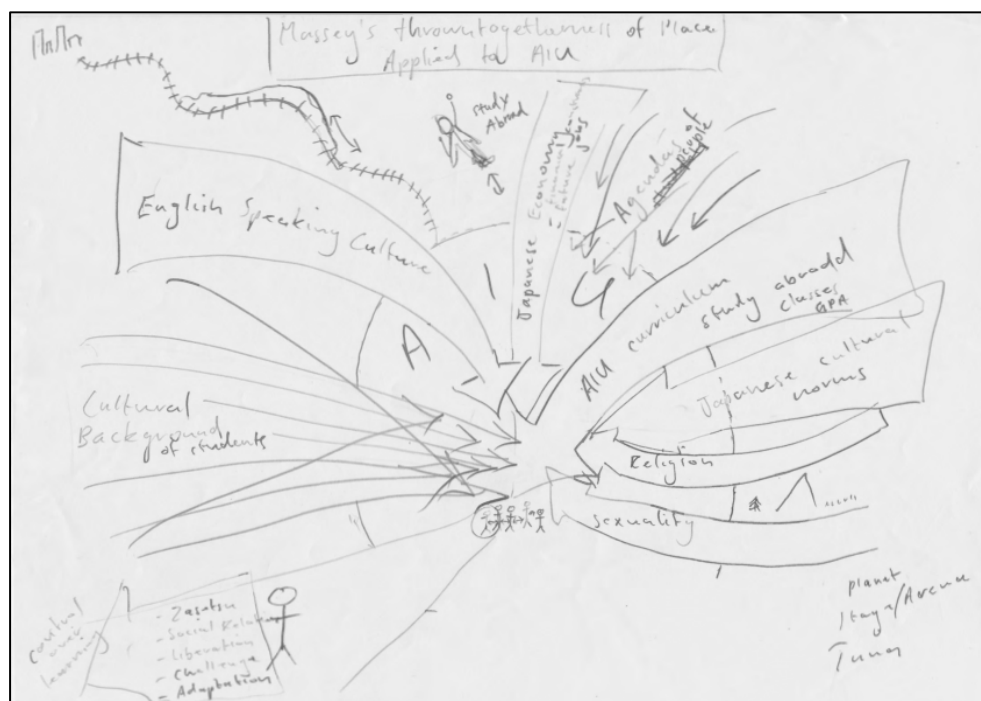
Interviewee category and (interviewer)	11) International Degree-Seeking Student no. 2 (Ayuka)	12) Super Senior no. 3 (Ayuka)
Do you think NLAU is unique?	Yes. The students are very tolerant of differences and interested in foreigners, in contrast to experiences she had in other parts of Japan.	-
Did you have any difficulties in or out of class? If so, how did you cope with them?	No major difficulties because she thinks NLAU are kinder than most people in Japan. However, in the freshman year she found it difficult to make friends because she felt that the Japanese students didn't feel it was worth the effort making friends with an international student who didn't speak English (which she didn't at the time – she is from Taiwan). In addition, her EAP classmates tended to use Japanese during group work, which excluded her because she did not speak much Japanese at the time. This motivated her to study Japanese hard.	She had lived in the US from elementary school until junior high school, so she had difficulty using Japanese, especially the polite forms required for her part-time job. She feels her Japanese has become worse since arriving at NLAU. Although she has no problem speaking and listening in English, she struggles with academic reading and writing and she is not comfortable speaking in front of others.
What motivated or demotivated your learning in NLAU?	Her desire to communicate naturally in Japanese with her Japanese friends motivated her work hard on her language skills. She didn't want them to have to make allowances for her. She did this by avoiding speaking Chinese as much as possible and using English and Japanese instead. She felt that this had been successful because from last year she started to think in Japanese. She is also motivated to get good grades so she can continue to qualify for her scholarship.	She is motivated to speak to her friends and listen to music.
Do you feel any frustration switching between languages?	She did, but now it is much better.	She finds it difficult to speak Japanese, despite being ethnically Japanese.

<b>What do you think about the environment of NLAU? (Here they emphasised that they had left this question open and did not lead them with examples, etc.)</b>	She felt blessed to be in a calm, natural environment. And she thought NLAU was wonderful in general. However, thought the classes were too general, and she wished there were more sports and arts classes. She criticised the Japanese students for sticking together and not mixing with the international students and she thought the international students did not take the classes seriously because they were too easy for them.	She likes the facilities at NLAU and thinks it is clean and comfortable and a good place to live away from her parents for the first time. However, she thinks the isolation makes it difficult to communicate with people outside the campus.
<b>Do you have any concerns or worries about life after NLAU?</b>	She is concerned that it will be too expensive to travel to job interviews from Akita.	She is concerned that her difficulties with the Japanese language will impede her efforts to get a job in Japan.
<b>Additional points</b>	-	-

*Ayuka, Akari, Yamato and Arisa, taken from Akari's notebook*

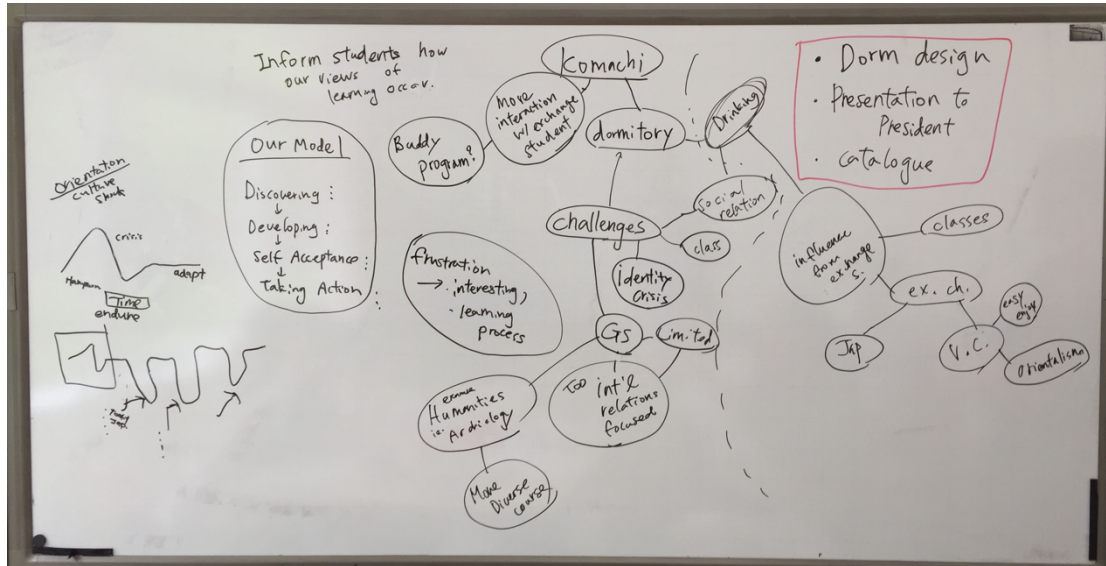


*Appendix 5.5: My attempt at bringing together Group 1's Post-Ethnography  
Conceptual Representations*





## Appendix 5.6: Group 1's brainstorming for their Synthesis and Recommendations (SR)



## Appendix 5.7: Instructional methods hand out provided for Group 2's Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry

### Methods Hand Out

#### Ethnographic Methods

##### Interviews

Interviews for research purposes are not natural interactions; they are carefully contrived by the interviewer with a particular agenda in mind. It is also important to bear in mind that an interviewee's responses about their perceptions and experiences are not an unmediated reflection of their psychic states or events as they happened. Interview data is socially constructed by the researcher and the participant (Carspecken, 1996; Pole and Morrison, 2003; Silverman, 2017; Wolcott, 2001). This means that the way that the interaction unfurls affects the content of the data. For this reason is important for interviewers to minimise the influence of their own preconceptions on the shape of the interview.

Carspecken (1996) suggests talking in concrete terms (initially, at least) and treating the interviewee as a colleague or peer. He favours semi-structured interviews with between two and five "lead-off" questions (which open up the topic that you wish to investigate) that refer to specific concrete events/experiences. From these the researcher can infer beliefs, values and feelings relating to the events. The interviewer is advised to bear in mind some "convert categories" (areas that the interviewer wishes to talk about, but doesn't want to mention them for fear of leading the interviewee). A list of "follow-up" questions for each lead-off question are also advised. During the interview, the way that the

## **Walking Interviews**

Walking interviews are based on the same principles as above, but are conducted whilst walking. They have been found to redress power differences in some circumstances and improve rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Jones et al., 2008; Lynch and Mannion, 2016), but the most obvious benefit is that it provides insights into people's relationship with space (Lynch and Mannion, 2016). Walking interviews could be conducted on a route predetermined by the interviewer (which would provide data on predefined places), or could be guided by the interviewee (which would tell the researcher more about the interviewee's relationship with the spaces in question). If the primary concern is that of the participant's relationship with space, it is important to provide spatial data that corresponds with the verbal data, which has some technical challenges. GPS has the potential to provide such data, when used in conjunction with audio and visual data (such as photographs (Lynch and Mannion, 2016)).

## **Focus Groups**

Focus groups follow similar principles to interviews, except that there are multiple participants and the researcher's role is that of a facilitator who provides prompts that are designed to promote discussion between the participants.

## **Participant Observation**

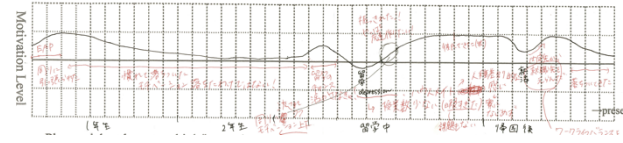
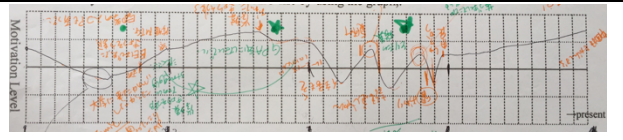
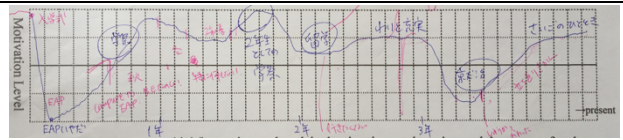
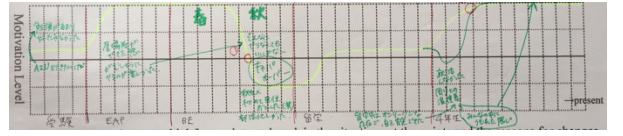
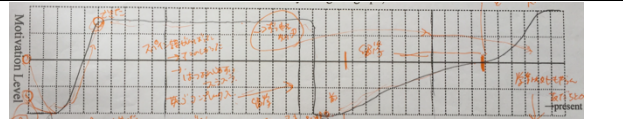
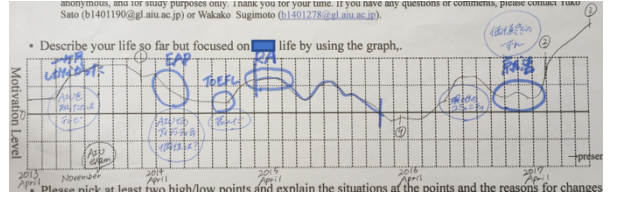
Participant observation is a data collection method that involves watching and studying people in a given setting. The researcher typically focuses on routines, rituals, language, discourse, symbols and signs that people use to make meaning and make sense of their daily lives (Stokes, 2008). The balance between participation and observation varies between studies, from being a detached observer to being the primary participant in the activity (O'Reilly, 2008). Pink (2009) emphasises the importance of paying particular attention to the multisensorial, emplaced aspects of participation: considering which senses should be emphasised or repressed and why. Participant observation is an interpretive method and, regardless of the extent to which the participant observer is involved in the phenomena under investigation, his or her presence has an impact that must be acknowledged. This highlights the importance of reflexivity: the constant consideration of how the social, cultural, historical and spatial context influences an encounter and one's interpretations of it (O'Reilly, 2008).

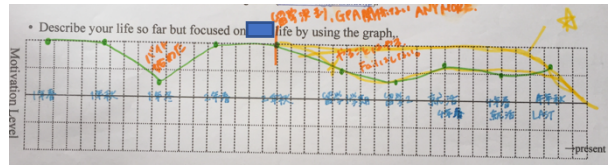
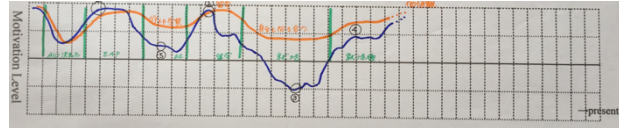
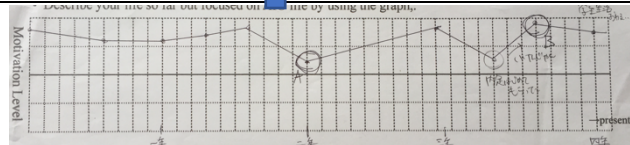
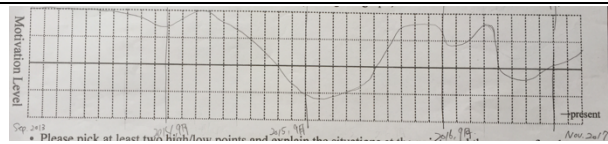
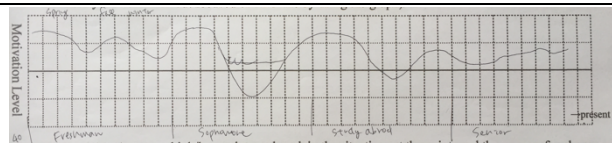
## **Participatory GIS**

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) involves the use of maps to manage, present and interpret information spatially. It is useful for answering questions of: where something is located; where something is concentrated; what kinds of things happen in a certain place; or, how a place is changing over time (Gubrium and Harper, 2016: 154). GIS has been used extensively in urban planning, public health and environmental and land use issues. However, it has faced criticism for being too dependent on technology that places it out of the reach of most communities, meaning it is implemented in a top-down way that often represents communities from dominant or official perspectives, failing to capture the lived realities of its members. A solution to this problem is to involve community members as participants in the creation and use of GIS: *participatory GIS*. Low-tech methods that can be used in participatory GIS include: *sketch mapping*; *map interviews* (which may result in *photo-maps* or *information overlays*); *three-dimensional modelling*; *walking interviews* and *participant observation* (see above) (Gubrium and Harper, 2016). It is also possible to combine these low-tech solutions with freely available map software, such as Google Maps.

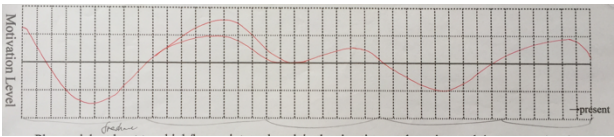
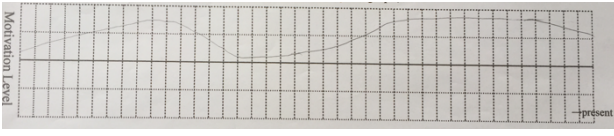
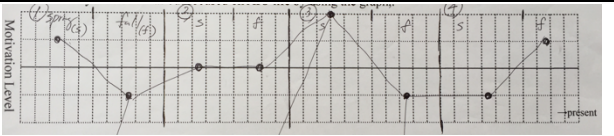
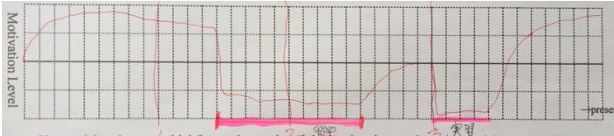
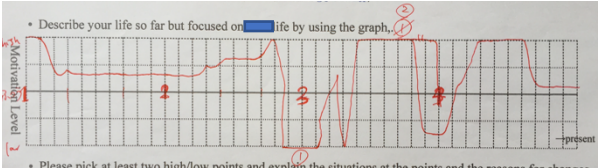
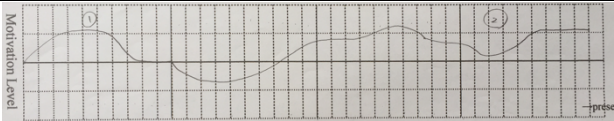
Regardless of which ethnographic method is used, the quality of the data rests on an effective and reliable recording system. In order to avoid the risk of placing all your faith in one method, it may be advisable to use a combination of a few methods. Recording techniques used in ethnographic research include: scratch notes; field notes; photography; audio recording and video recording. Scratch notes are the brief notes and scribbles taken while interviewing or participant observation. They may record events, words, quotes or they may be notes about the way you are feeling, sensations, intuitions or ideas that come up: they could be anything. Normally, as soon after the data collection session is over as possible, scratch notes are used to make comprehensive field notes that document all the events that took place, usually chronologically, in as much detail as possible, including the content of conversations, details of the context, emotional reactions (yours and the participants), relevant body language and reflective/reflexive observations. Needless to say, if the focus of the research is visual, photography is the most efficient and faithful way to record images. An audio recording of an interview will give far richer data than simply scratch notes, since it would be possible to examine the way that things were said more closely and take direct quotes. There is also the added advantage of allowing you to focus more closely on the interaction. Video recording provides even richer data, since it also provides the visual context.

Appendix 5.8: Group 2's Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry Phase 1 Data (\* indicates that they were selected for a follow-up interview in the second phase and \*\* indicates that interviews were conducted)

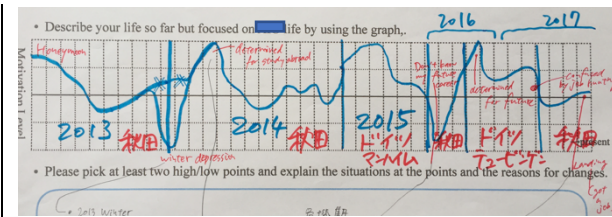
No.	M/F	Image of trajectory	Key points from their trajectories
1**	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High – after a trip home during her study abroad, she was very happy and motivated to have a fruitful study abroad</li> <li>• Low – prior to above, she could not get used Norway, few friends and homesickness</li> </ul>
2**	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was very motivated by his involvement in the school festival in his 2<sup>nd</sup> year because he had many jobs to do.</li> <li>• He was demotivated by EAP in the first year because he thought it was nonsense, but he became motivated by BE courses.</li> </ul>
3**	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowest - Hardships in EAP. (incomprehensible)</li> <li>• Highest – uni festival in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. 4<sup>th</sup> grade, second half, fun</li> </ul>
4**	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was used to NLAU by BE second half, but after that her motivation declined, missed classes and didn't do her homework</li> <li>• After returning from study abroad in the fourth grade, she enjoyed studying and learning and it was fun, because her English had improved, she had gained knowledge and she had learned how to study</li> </ul>
5**	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broken heart x 2</li> </ul>
6**	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lost her confidence on the “stazemi” (Start Now seminar – pre-NLAU workshop for incoming students)</li> <li>• Big turning point was her internship because she decided to restart her job hunting</li> <li>• She was making the most of her last moments at uni – fun every day</li> <li>• In the last moments in RA group, she felt regret at the way that she treated the other RAs.</li> </ul>

7*	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She liked NLAU environment and was inspired by other people's intelligence so she was motivated. She wanted to get a good GPA for her desired study abroad uni.</li> <li>• She was spending time working on her teaching qualification which does not count towards GPA so she had no motivation</li> <li>• Spring 2<sup>nd</sup> year, got good GPA and was enjoying living alone for the first time and enjoyed cooking</li> <li>• Study abroad – more motivated to make friends and learn about the area than classes</li> <li>• Focused on job hunting and enjoying NLAU classes, which were very homey</li> <li>• She was very motivated because she saw it as her last chance to learn at NLAU</li> </ul>
8*	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High – she was confident in her English, but others were also good so she felt she had to work hard to keep up</li> <li>• High – study abroad: She worked hard in her new environment</li> <li>• High – After job hunting and her internship she was relaxed</li> <li>• Low – After returning from her study abroad she wanted to study hard, but job hunting and internship prevented it</li> <li>• Low – in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade after study abroad was decided</li> </ul>
9	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A - Broken heart</li> <li>• B – got a job</li> </ul>
10	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivated when she first started at NLAU and for the first half of her study abroad. She is motivated when the environment changes, but then she gets tired and loses her motivation</li> <li>• Low motivation before study abroad, feeling like she didn't want to do it. She felt desperate when she was job hunting, but felt very relieved when it finished.</li> </ul>
11	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She felt very excited when she entered NLAU</li> <li>• Leading up to study abroad, she was very motivated to get a high GPA to enable her to go to the school she wanted to go to.</li> <li>• After she had attained the GPA she needed to study abroad she became demotivated to study</li> <li>• During job hunting, she was not motivated to study because of the pressures of finding a job</li> </ul>



12	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High - Sophomore – GPA was good. He was studying hard for study abroad and graduate school. He was satisfied with his private life, too.</li> <li>• High - Now – he was more realistic about the future and was making an effort to be who he wanted to be and he was satisfied in his social life</li> <li>• Low – EAP – he felt that he couldn't communicate in English</li> <li>• Low – during study abroad – not fun many dilemma, second thoughts about going to graduate school</li> </ul>
13	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She was most motivated before study abroad</li> <li>• Her motivation gradually decreased during study abroad because the classes were easier than those at NLAU.</li> <li>• After finding a job, her vision for her future was clear, so she became motivated again.</li> </ul>
14	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• - she was bored so she doubted whether NLAU as the right uni for her</li> <li>• + She met some very fun people on study abroad</li> <li>• - her fun friends all went back to their home countries so she was sad</li> </ul>
15	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study abroad – lonely because nobody could understand his Japanese. He felt isolated and felt like he was losing touch with reality. He failed some classes because of this</li> <li>• Internship – he is anxious about teaching and feels like he wants to escape. He didn't have a good relationship with his teacher so he lost more credits.</li> </ul>
16	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She got depressed during her first few months of her study abroad, due to environmental changes (difficulties making friends, weather etc.), but got better as she made friends and the weather improved.</li> <li>• She became very motivated during the last few months of study abroad. After realising that study abroad would end soon, she wanted to enjoy every minute. In the end she loved the country and didn't want to leave.</li> </ul>
17	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She became very motivated after becoming confident in her English ability, shortly after starting EAP.</li> <li>• During job hunting, she was worried about her future so her motivation decreased, but after getting a job it increased again.</li> </ul>

18	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A – broken heart (low point)</li> <li>• B – Living with friends (high point)</li> <li>• C – Got ill (low point)</li> <li>• D – Study abroad (high point)</li> </ul>
19	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low point – she thought she was the lowest EAP student in terms of her English</li> <li>• Low point – Couldn't balance part-time work and study</li> <li>• High point – She noticed her English speaking ability was good after returning from study abroad</li> <li>• High point – On realising that she would graduate soon, she began to really appreciate her time there and saw it as a luxury</li> </ul>
20	M		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demotivated [to study?] in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year because he put too much effort into his club activities</li> <li>• On study abroad, initially he had low motivation and hesitated to participate in class</li> <li>• However, he realised that he was wasting his time there, so changed his mind and decided to take tough course and was able to overcome the challenges</li> <li>• After study abroad, he became serious about his future career and became motivated to learn</li> </ul>
21	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After entering NLAU and getting used to student life she was energised</li> <li>• Study abroad was harder than she imagined, but she was motivated to try anything</li> </ul>
22	F		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High internship – recovered from an initial failure she got back on her feet</li> <li>• High job-hunting – She started to think seriously about her future and seek a job she wanted</li> <li>• Low fall semester (freshman) – Due to having a hard time she couldn't go to her circle, and her health suffered and she couldn't study very well</li> <li>• Low now – couldn't find anything she wanted to do after finding a job for after graduation, while in Akita so she was feeling directionless</li> </ul>



- In winter 2013, she became depressed due to a shitty life cycle, a breakup, shitty weather – it was a crisis period.
- She becomes motivated when she knows what to do.



## *Appendix 5.9: Synthesis and Recommendations (SR) presented to the President and Vice President of the University*

### Policy Recommendation Brief

In this brief, we would like to make policy recommendations based on the findings of a research project on learning and learner autonomy in NLAU. The project was facilitated by Joe Sykes and involved six undergraduate NLAU students: Yuko Sato (senior); Wakako Sugimoto (senior); Akari Kurata (senior); Ayuka Umeda (senior); Arisa Ibe (senior); and, Yamato Tomioka (junior). There will, first, be a brief explanation of our methodology; followed by an outline of the findings, and we will conclude with our recommendations.

#### The Project

The goal of this project was to explore NLAU from the perspective of learning and learner autonomy. Our research question was:

***How and why do students exercise control over their own learning in the context of NLAU?***

We sought to conceptualise learning from the perspective of the students, identify the ways that students exercise control over their learning and the elements in the NLAU context that influence this. It was a participative project, meaning that, rather than being the ‘subjects’ of the research, the participants played the role of ‘co-researchers’, in which they were active participants in decision making and carrying out the research. At the onset of the project, all participants were intending to pursue graduate education after graduating from NLAU and hoped to gain experience participating in a real research project. There were a total of twenty-one research meetings, with work completed between sessions.

The project involved three phases: an *auto-ethnographic phase*, in which participants used their ‘insider’ status to reflect on their experiences and conceptualise NLAU as a learning place, where students take control over their learning processes; an *ethnographic phase*,

where they extended their understanding of NLAU by undertaking an ethnographic inquiry into the perspectives of a broader sample of students; and, an *action phase*, in which we used our findings to inform evidence-based policy recommendations.

## Main Findings

- 1. Learning emerges from the dynamics between the individual and elements in the NLAU environment.** Through our research, it became clear that learning results from the interaction between the individual and the physical, economic, political, systemic and sociocultural elements in the NLAU environment. The way that students engage with these elements varies depending on their personalities, histories, capacities and interests, meaning that each journey through NLAU is unique.
- 2. Learning in NLAU is ultimately a matter of *personal transformation*.** Learning was conceived in a number of ways – language acquisition, academic knowledge acquisition, learning to learn, development of personal interests, etc. – but ultimately we took a *deep* view of learning; we saw learning as *personal transformation*, in which identities were challenged and developed. A key component of this, for most people, was the experience of ‘zasetu’ (挫折), a sense of failure and a loss of confidence. The diversity and dynamism of NLAU (along with its rigorous curriculum) challenges students academically, socially and psychologically, often causing them to feel inadequate to the demands of the context; this forces them to take a critical perspective of themselves and of the sociocultural environments in which they grew up, and to adapt to the new environment. This process has a profoundly transformative affect on the students. Most students experience this at a number of stages in their journey through NLAU. The resulting change in perspective is remarkably similar to the goals laid out in NLAU’s official “President’s Message” – “[students must] liberate themselves from the values and conventions that have shaped them, and then develop a new self with international perspectives”.
- 3. Control over learning requires knowledge of the self, awareness of the forces that shape it and the confidence to act.** We found that, since learning is fundamentally about identity transformation, in order to take control over this process, one must be aware of it and make decisions to actively construct one’s

identity. This may involve setting goals and working towards them, participating in communities that support the construction of the desired identity or identifying and pursuing personal interests. We discovered that the reflective practices involved in carrying out this research (including not only the participants, but also their thirty plus informants) were instrumental in becoming aware of and being able to take control of the learning process.

## Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

1. It could be argued that **personal transformation is fundamental to a liberal arts education**; a notion that is supported by the concept of international liberal arts described in the “President’s Message”, on the official website. However, as far as we are aware, little explicit attention is paid to this during the orientation of incoming students. We feel it would be of benefit to **make this strand of the NLAU curriculum more explicit**, and provide details of the processes involved, such as those found in this research: i.e. personal transformation occurs through active engagement in the diverse and dynamic community and rising to the challenges of the environment and the rigorous curriculum.
2. Since we found that reflection and sharing our experiences was so important in taking ownership over the learning process, we recommend **building guided reflective discussion activities (similar to those we used in our research) into the NLAU system at specified intervals**, such as after EAP, immediately prior to study abroad, immediately after or during job-hunting and prior to graduation. This could easily be facilitated through the existing EPOS e-portfolio system, the current advising system, the study abroad seminar and the job-hunting seminar.
3. The insights that we gained into our selves and our life at NLAU, through participating in this research project, lead us to believe that such an opportunity should also be given to others. Therefore, we believe that **a course that facilitates participative research into aspects of the lives of students should be offered as part of the NLAU curriculum**.

Note: This project constitutes a part of Joe Sykes’s PhD research that he is undertaking at the University of Westminster

### *Appendix 5.10 – Ayuka’s Reflective Paragraph (RP)*

Ayuka Umeda

Reflective paragraph

This research was helpful for me to learn how NLAU shapes each student’s life. It was nice that I could reflect, visualize, and analyze my own experiences at NLAU. Also I was able to see my path at NLAU objectively by listening to what other student researchers said. Analyzing other students’ narratives was also very interesting because I was able to know that students have diverse learning experiences at NLAU. I realized a lot of students took the initiative to achieve their goal or to make their college life meaningful, but the ways they do this vary. The discussion with other student researchers was the most interesting experience for me. It gave me new perspectives that I otherwise did not know. One of the important things I learned from discussion was that students who do not have confidence in speaking English tend to think there seems to be a hierarchy in NLAU based on students’ English ability, whereas students who can speak English fluently tend to think English is a minor factor in determining NLAU students’ lives.

### *Appendix 5.11 Arisa’s Reflective Paragraph (RP)*

Reflective Paragraph – Arisa

(Typed by Joe from Arisa’s research journal – 12-8-17 – no changes made)

As for EAP students (EAP3 and 1), they have had some difficulties to learn English and they sometimes feel inferiority compared with others. However, one Bridge students shared that he also needs to make effort to pass English classes such as writing composition classes. In the sense of language the bridge student has two “persons” in his mind and they reflect his attitudes and emotions. Thus, language and personality are mutually affected, while EAP students mostly think Japanese especially for something more academic or more complicated. Both bridge and EAP students feel frustration when they seeking good expressions. Their motivations are different but they picked up following: personality, peer pressure, NLAU environment (curriculum), graduation and study abroad requirement, and so on.

From those stories NLAU environment greatly contributed to students' learning, through classes, communication, curriculum. Also they mentioned that NLAU has many unique characteristic students with deep and various background. It is interesting for them to interact with variety of students, professors, and faculties are good point of NLAU for them. However, NLAU is isolated from outsider so they need to make contact with local people, or Tokyo. It affected their job hunting for example. Overall, although individual motivations are different everyone finds own interests through learning in NLAU or study abroad destination and try to improve themselves by overcoming their problems and challenges. They are positive toward making mistakes or taking time to manage their lives.

### *Appendix 5.12 – Yamato's Reflective Paragraph (RP)*

#### Yamato's reflective paragraph

Our qualitative research began with sharing our own learning experience at NLAU, using many different devices and methods (multimodal narrative). For my own part, I wrote some diary-like pages to look back on my whole time from the entrance until up to present. My narrative includes major events I encountered at NLAU, which have largely influenced my way of thinking and learning habits. From the diary, I extracted the most decisive experience and presented it to the group. This process helped me have an objective view to analyze what affected my learning and how I have exercised control over my own learning.

After gathering each member's narrative, the team developed a visual representation of many factors that contribute to shape the learning of NLAU students, factors such as physical environment, student's personality, classes offered by faculty, language, and so on. In order to expand our visual map, we further conducted interviews with other NLAU students to confirm our theory. Although every student had different experience and thoughts about their leaning experience, the team could find out several similarities among broad NLAU students and draw a finalized conceptualization.

### *Appendix 5.13 -Akari's Reflective Paragraph (RP)*

Akari Kurata

August 11, 2017

#### **Reflection Paragraph**

When I was in high school and two year women's college, I rarely felt inferiority to my English proficiency. However, since the range of students' English proficiency and financial background at NLAU are wider and more diverse than there, I have been disappointed at my language skills because even though students have various level of proficiency, classes require same amount of assignments and quality of presentations. I need longer time to do everything than those who have English background. However, throughout this research, I realized that NLAU students more or less in the same environment have gone through the experience of *zasetu* which is kind of the rite of passage after moving outside a comfort zone. I personally believe it is an ideal learning environment that classes and programs offered by university and student diversities at NLAU motivate students' learning.

Throughout our research and analysis, I thought that university has room for improvement for following three points. First, university should provide enough resident services. One interviewee pointed out the rent of dormitories is expensive, and the number of them is not enough so that students force to live off-campus due to drawing result. However since the rent for room around Goshono, the one of the nearest regions from the university, is more expensive than the other areas of Akita, eventually students are faced with more severe financial difficulty. It is difficult for them to handle their learning while having a part time job. While students' financial background is different, the university should provide the better and the best options for students to focus on learning. Second, even though some students pointed out the isolated environment of university is good to focus on studying, some students hope to have more opportunities to interact with local community. If university is designed as a place of connecting with diverse people, making free spaces on campus, it would be expand opportunities to communicate with local people and Japanese and international students. Third, although our research concluded that self is an important element of NLAU as a learning place, university does not offer any courses to analyze and explore students themselves. While some students say peer pressure and study abroad experience have influence on their learning motivation, they do not analyze and explore themselves from academic perspectives. Therefore offering these classes for personal analysis will support students learning strategy.

## *Appendix 5.14 Wakako's Reflective Paragraph (RP)*

Reflection

Wakako Sugimoto

Through this discussion, I could reflect what I have done in NLAU. It also was a fruitful, intense time to deeply discuss how this university raise students up. The environment of this university pretty differs from other universities in Japan, which affects students motivation and attitude as well. I knew I changed a lot, but I could not explain how exactly I changed. Once we discussed what specifically influenced my learning, I could realize how my identity modified into open-minded and intercultural one. I was surprised that somehow other senior students also thought the same things. They underwent “zasetsu (hardship)” at some point, which let them notice themselves to be changed. It was my first time to think students' learning environment. However, it was written in NLAU mission, and also it is what RA thinks. NLAU mission states that NLAU environment allows student to enhance their international abilities and also to liberate themselves from stereotypical thoughts and ideas. As for RAs, they try to make the residential community where residents can learn from each other by spending time with others and conflicting each other to overcome issues. I feel I could take the path which was ideal for NLAU students somehow. It was maybe I was always conscious what I am doing. Since I am interested in anything, I tried to absorb things as much as possible. As I could learn in this university, I really want others to cultivate themselves as much as they can. Learning English or getting a better job is not the only goal students can achieve, though that is obvious so that they can easily aim at. Students should learn more about themselves first, if they want to see the world. In order to do so, the university need not only write this kind of things in NLAU mission, but also it needs to tell the mission to students again and again in various ways such as having a lecture during orientation week, telling via e-mail, putting some posters on campus and so on. Again, what NLAU students should do is to think about themselves and change their identities through spending time with diverse people and studying at totally different place from their own culture.

## *Appendix 5.15 \_Yuko's Reflective Paragraph (RP)*

Yuko Sato

Reflective Narrative

Taking control over learning

As an adult student who came to NLAU and as a person who had struggled with low socioeconomic status, I was desperate to get ‘educated.’ I did not have a clear idea of what learning or education meant. I thought of education as something like a saviour that would finally give me answer to my question of inequality and feeling of inferiority I felt as someone without a college degree. Through working this project, I was able to think about what I ‘education’ and ‘learning’ means to me by looking back at my experiences at NLAU. Through this project, I learned to forgive and accept myself for who I am. I no longer feel inferior. Not

just because I am about to get my first college degree, but I am able to see myself from a different perspective.

I knew that I ‘learned’ something through my NLAU experience but could not define or give a clear explanation what skill I gained. By listening to others’ views on learning and discussing multimodal, I realized that I had learned to ‘integrate’ to this complex learning environment as ‘Subject’ that Paulo Freire defines. Paulo Freire (1974) states that “integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality” and that “the integrated person is person as Subject (p.4)”. Whereas ‘adoption’ is a stage where a person would lose capacity to make a choice and has nothing but to ‘adjust’ to the situation as the ‘object.’

Before coming to NLAU, I had no other way than to adapt to the situations that I was in. Even when I came to NLAU, I thought I had to try harder and be better at everything because of my age and my status as the Bridge student. At that point, I was still trying to adapt to the situation without being able to look at the situation critically. Through gaining knowledge and learning to see things critically and explaining it logically, I learned to take control of my perspectives. Not entirely, but to some extent, better than before. I can now ask myself why I was feeling or understanding things that I have been.

I was only able to realize this by listening to others’ struggle and by sharing my struggle. Because I never had a chance to verbally communicate my experience to others, I never really had chance to express and to accept my learning outcomes. I can now state that I went through “integration.” My experience may not have many things in common with other students, who are much younger than I am and are often junjapa. However, I have realized now that I have ‘learned’ things that others did not because of who I am. I also learned to take action and choices from this someone unique standpoint. As an older student, I realized that I had been looking at my colleagues not just as classmates but as younger siblings. And it was meaningful for me to be able to do so.

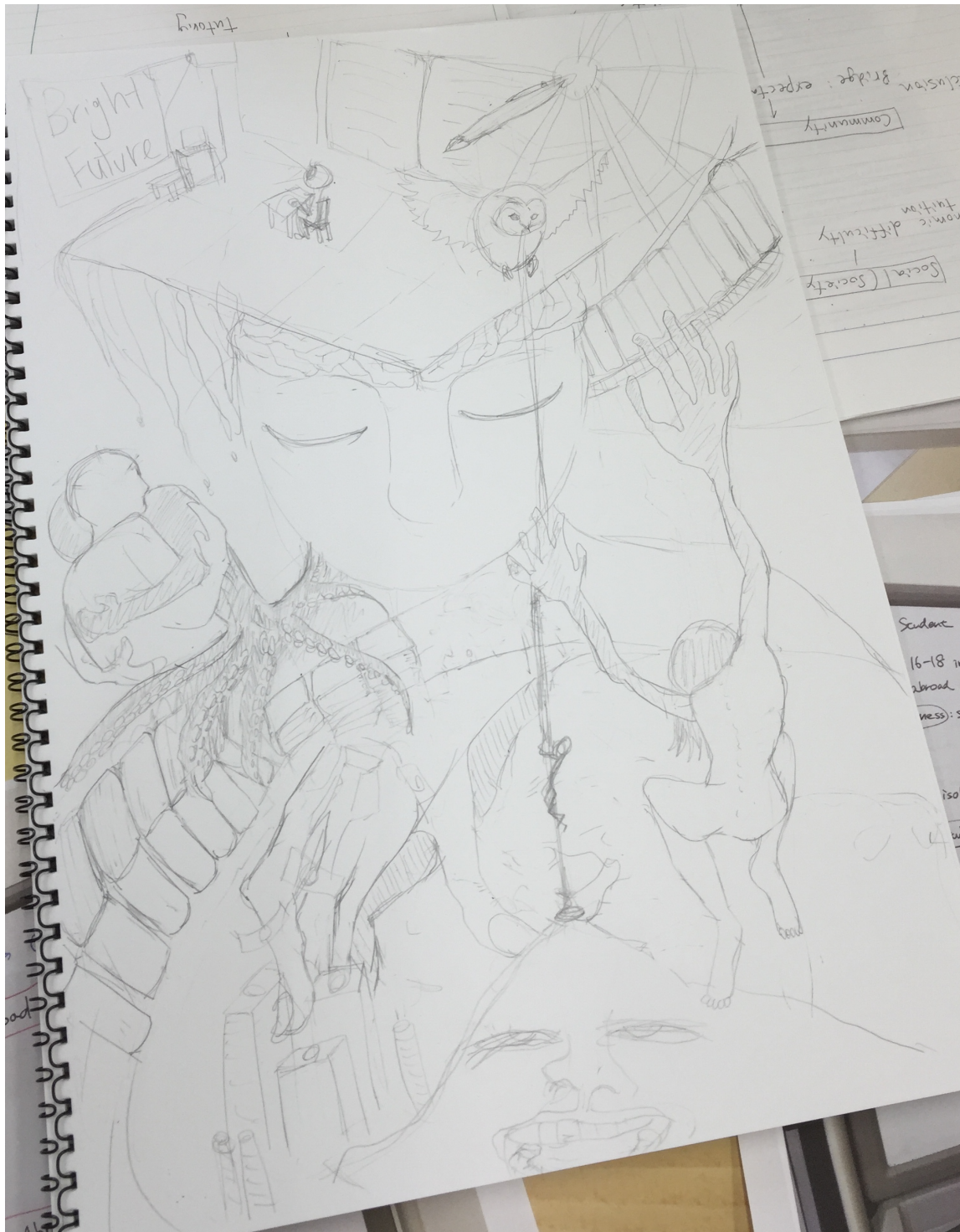
Through this research, I also started to be more critical of the system of education. I used to blindly believe in the power of education, as giving me innovative power and making me more competitive member of society. Education, in some sense, was like a messiah, the only hope for me to get out of poverty and my feeling of inferiority. By thinking about ‘learning’ and my experience and struggles at NLAU, I started to realize that university education is an institution where society, economy, and politics are complexly intertwined. Realizing that education was no longer a savior, I went through a phase of despair while working on my multimodal narrative. My first draft of my multimodal narrative represented my despair towards education and to myself as a blind follower of illusion educational institution gave me. However,



through listening to others' achievements at NLAU and realizing what my younger colleagues, my little brothers and sisters, have become, I was able to realize my growth as well. The second draft of my narrative represents myself raising from despair through 'taking control over learning.' I am still taking part of this system of education, but I am no longer a slave to its illusion but a critical and continuous participant. This experience also made me more interested in becoming an educator. After all, it is education and the participants of education who could 'take control of learning,' and change the system of education.

From participation in this research, I have learned the importance of self-reflection. In a restless and complex environment as NLAU, it is especially beneficial for students to take a deep breath, sit down, and take time to look back at themselves. Without doing so, students would become an 'object' who only make 'adaptation' without their own will or choice.

Appendix 5.16 – First draft of Yuko's MN



## Appendix 7.1 – Appraisal of the methodology

I endeavoured to maximise the quality of the research according to criteria set out in section 3.1.5: ‘rich rigour’, ‘sincerity’, ‘credibility’, ‘meaningful coherence’ and ‘ethicality’. I would argue that the abundant data of multiple types that included video, field notes and student generated data of multiple types, collected systematically over one year and interpreted from multiple theoretical perspectives met the criterion of *rich rigour*. In terms of *sincerity*, I attempted to be self-reflexive at all times throughout the inquiry and reflexivity was built into the tasks given to the inquiry, but I must acknowledge the limitations of my inescapable subjectivity. I also strove to make the methodological process transparent within the constraints of word limits and readability, which necessitated compromises. I admit that much methodological detail was cut from thesis in the edit, some of which I included in the appendix, but much of it I was forced to omit. The combination of tasks, such as the construction of the MN and the SLI, with dialogue in the sessions, led to ‘thick’ descriptions of learning in NLAU from multiple perspectives. This, in addition to the involvement of the IGMs in the interpretation of data, I would argue, assured the *credibility* of the inquiry. With regards to *meaningful coherence*, I propose that the care I took to develop methods that reflected the processual nature of reality and the multimodal nature of meaning-making paid dividends in the rich data produced on identity construction and learner autonomy in relation to social configurations from the immediate community to transnational affinity groups. I did, however, have reservations about the conclusions that I could draw from semiotic analyses of the data: since NLAU is a novel context, and perhaps chaotic from a semiotic perspective, a separate inquiry would be needed to begin to understand the emergent uses of meaning making resources. Finally, the RPs suggested that the benefits that I gained from the inquiry group dedication to the inquiry were reciprocated in the increased learner autonomy that they gained and in the ways that I outlined above, in section 7.3, thereby achieving the *ethicality* that I strove for.

Were I to repeat the inquiry, I would improve my methods of documentation. Firstly, I would improve the quality of the audio recording by recording each participant separately by means of lavalier microphones, since some audio data was lost due to the insufficient reach of the microphones. Secondly, I would transcribe the videos from the

start, rather than paraphrasing in 'fieldnotes', because I ultimately transcribed them anyway, rendering the field notes a waste of time. My original rationale for the producing the fieldnotes was to document my reflexive processes alongside documentation of the dialogue. This was an important component of data interpretation, but I could add reflexive comments as I transcribe.

# Glossary

## Acronyms and Institutional and technical terms

ACSC	Academic Career Support Centre - A service to assist in applications to graduate schools
NLAU	Northern Liberal Arts University
ALAC	Active Learning and Assessment Centre - The administrative structure that includes the LDIC, the ASC and the ACSC (see below)
ASC	Academic Support Centre - NLAU's peer-tutoring service
Bridge Program	Preparatory program for students who have significant international experience and high English proficiency
CCR	Collaborative Conceptual Representation – the inquiry group's efforts to conceptualise NLAU in terms of learner autonomy based on their Independent Conceptual Representations (ICRs - see below)
CNA	Collaborative Narrative Analysis - The inquiry group's analysis of each Multimodal Narrative (MN – see below)
CoP	Community of Practice
(d)iscourse	Language used in interactions in our immediate interpersonal context
(D)iscourse	"[W]ays of being in the world", including "ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects, symbols, tools, and technologies", in addition to language, "to recognise yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways" (Gee, 2004: 7)
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
GB	Global Business - The other of the two advanced study programs at NLAU

GPA	Grade Point Average - The means by academic success is measured across the NLAU curriculum
GS	Global Studies - One of the two advanced study programs at NLAU
Horizons of significance	The social milieu from which we draw our values
ICR	Individual Conceptual Representation - The IGMs' individual efforts to conceptualise NLAU in terms of learner autonomy, on the basis of the Collaborative Narrative Analyses (CNA – see above)
IGM	Inquiry Group Member - One of the six members of the inquiry group, to be distinguished from 'participants', who were other NLAU students with whom the IGMs generated further data in their Student-Led Inquiry (SLI – see below)
L1	First Language
L2	Second language
LDIC	Language Development and Intercultural Centre – NLAU's self-access language learning centre
MJR	Multimodal Research Journal – completed by the IGMs to keep track of their experiences in the inquiry
MN	Multimodal Narrative
PBL	Project Based Learning – a program at NLAU in which students collaborate with students and faculty from other universities or institutions on a project that addresses a specific issue.
PECR	Post-Ethnography Conceptual Representation – the inquiry group's reconceptualization of NLAU from the perspective of learner autonomy, undertaken after the Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry (SLEI – see below)
RA	Resident Assistant – a paid role students take on to assist in dealing with issues in the dormitories
RP	Reflective Paragraphs – the Inquiry Group Members' (IGMs' – see above) reflections on their experiences of the inquiry process

Self-shaping type 1	Making choices on the basis of our values
Self-shaping type 2	Choosing our values
SLEI	Student-Led Ethnographic Inquiry – inquiry conducted by the inquiry group into the perspectives of other NLAU students
SLI	Student-Led Inquiry
SR	Synthesis and Recommendations – the inquiry group’s synthesis of their findings and their recommendations to NLAU’s administration
Strong evaluation	Evaluation of one’s own values through dialogue or introspection
TLP	Teacher Licence Program – a program in which NLAU students undergo courses that prepare them to take the national teacher’s licence exam
TOEFL	Test Of English as a Foreign Language – a standardised academic English exam used in NLAU to stream students and determine their readiness for study abroad and progressing through the curriculum

## Recurring Japanese Terms

Ikigai	生きがい	Power to live
Kikokushijo	帰国子女	Returnee – a Japanese child who lived abroad and returned to Japan
Kohai	後輩	One’s junior in a community or organisation
Junjapa	純ジャパ	Pure Japanese – a Japanese person with no international experience

Senpai	先輩	One's senior in a community or organisation
Zassetsu	挫折	Feeling of failure



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