Becoming Autonomous and Autonomy-Supportive of Others: Student Community Leaders' Reflective Learning Experiences in a Leadership Training Course

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Author Biography

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Abstract

This study explores student community leaders' learning experiences while taking a leadership training course, which aimed to assist them to be autonomous themselves and autonomy-supportive to others. The five leaders who participated in this narrative study were organizers of student-led language learning communities where students regularly met in a Self-Access Center (SAC) to learn with and from each other. The leaders' narratives (interviews and final reflection papers) indicated that collaborative leadership, need-supportive roles (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Reeve, 2016), and conscious reflection (Boud et al., 1985; Little, 1991) were the key concepts that influenced their leadership and beliefs. Moreover, the leaders' efforts in these areas enabled their communities to become Communities of Practice (CoPs), in which students collectively defined practice and exercised collaborative control as a community (Wenger et al., 2002). Although many studies have described student involvement as crucial for SACs to be social learning spaces, there is not much research on perspectives of student leaders nor student-led communities. Thus, this study highlights student leadership in a SAC from a CoP perspective and explores the leaders' experiences in developing autonomy-supportive skills for sustainable communities.

本稿は，学生ラーニングコミュニティー（LC）リーダーが学習者オートノミーへの理解を深め，自らが運営する LC 参加者のオートノミーを助成する過程を，彼/女らのトレーニングコース受講経験を通して考察する。5 人の研究参加者は，学習者主導型 LC のリーダーであり，週セルフアクセスセンター（SAC）にて，自主的に言語の協働学習の場を提供している。インタビューと記述式リフレクションのナラティブ分析の結果，コラボレーション型リーダーシップ，参加者の基本的心理欲求の充足を促す役割（Deci & Ryan, 2000; Reeve, 2016），意識的内省 (Boud et al., 1985; Little, 1991）が，リーダーの考えや行動に影響を及ぼした主要な概念であったと分かった。さらに，リーダーのそれら概念における取り組みは，LC が実践共同体（Wenger et al., 2002）になることを可能とした。近年，SAC における協働学習の場の提供には，学生の主体性が不可欠であるとされているが，学生の視点や学生主導型コミュニティの研究は希少である。したがって，本研究は，実践共同体の観点を念頭に，他学生のオートノミーをサポートする学生リーダーシップの可能性を探る。

Keywords: learner autonomy, student leadership, communities of practice, learning communities, self-access center

With the recognition of the value of social perspectives in the field of second language acquisition (the so-called social turn in SLA; Block, 2003), the definition of learner autonomy has also evolved from the idea of learners taking responsibility for and making decisions about their own learning (Holec, 1981) to a concept that embraces social aspects such as interdependence and collaboration with other learners (Benson, 2011; Dam et al., 1990). Therefore, Self-Access Centers' (SAC) responsibilities have also expanded from providing learning support and materials for individual learners to designing social learning spaces where students can learn with and from each other (Murray, 2014; Mynard, in press).

As a full-time learning advisor in a SAC, I have conducted various projects with students to create social learning opportunities, including peer advising (Curry & Watkins, 2016), tandem language exchange within the institution and in collaboration with another institution (Watkins, 2019), student-led events, and Learning Communities (LCs). My recent focus has been on LCs in which learners who have similar interests and goals meet regularly in the SAC to develop their knowledge and skills while using English as authentic communication and a learning tool. My previous study of the LCs showed how such a holistic approach to learning has the potential to promote persistence and enjoyment in learning (Watkins, in press). Moreover, for the same study, I observed some students in the LCs assuming leadership roles and becoming near-peer role models (Murphey, 1998) for other students. I often use the metaphor "planting autonomy seeds, watering, and fertilizing" when describing working with these student leaders. Similar to what I do while advising in language learning (Kato & Mynard, 2016), I do not tell students what to do. Instead, I assist these students in envisioning what they can do (planting seeds), show opportunities and choices (watering), and check on them frequently to facilitate their needs (fertilizing).

Although observing the growing seeds is fascinating and rewarding, it is time-consuming. I want to see more students assuming leadership roles and exercising their autonomy. At the same time, I need to help the leaders to make the existing communities sustainable. The more the number of LCs increased, the more I felt my limitation of time in supporting these student leaders. Thus, I needed to make my "autonomy farming" more systematic than my ad-hoc support, which would also allow other advisors to be involved. Therefore, I created an autonomy-supportive leadership course to train the student leaders with the knowledge, skills, and reflective learning necessary for a community organization. The course utilizes an outside-the-classroom, individualized learning model, making it versatile to support any student leaders such as SAC workers and club leaders by any advisors and teachers with an understanding of learner autonomy. The semester-long course

has been run three times. In the first semester, it was only offered to LC leaders, but from the second semester, some SAC student workers who lead a project team/community also took the course. In addition, SAC administrative staff who work with student workers requested to join the course voluntarily. However, the present study only focuses on the experiences of the five leaders of language LCs who initially took the course. By exploring their narratives from the interviews and their final reflection papers, I will explore the student community leaders' needs and how the course contents influenced their leadership and beliefs.

Theoretical Background

Learner Autonomy: Independence in Interdependence with Inner Endorsement

In the field of language education, the concept of learner autonomy was introduced with a purpose of putting learners in the center of their learning and treating them as unique individuals with different learning styles, backgrounds, and affective learning states. Therefore, the definition of learner autonomy also emphasized individuality and independence of learners. For example, Holec (1981) described learner autonomy as learners' ability to take responsibility and make decisions about their own learning. Later, social views, which see language as a form of social practice, emerged in the field of SLA, and the definition of learner autonomy also expanded and highlighted the social aspect. For example, the definition known as the 'Bergen definition' described learner autonomy as "capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person" (Dam et al., 1990, p. 102). Little (2007) explained that the concept of learner autonomy shifted from "a matter of learners doing things on their own" to "a matter of learners doing things not necessary on their own but for themselves" (p. 14). Therefore, learner autonomy exists with individual learners being independent while also being interdependent with other learners.

Another concept that has emerged in the field of SLA and learner autonomy is learner motivation. Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT) emphasizes the significance of intrinsic motivation, which can be enhanced by psychological needs fulfillment, namely a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Reeve (2016) described competence as the need for taking on challenges, making progress, and mastering; autonomy as the need for inner endorsement of one's own behaviors and thoughts; and relatedness as the need to feel warm relationships and acceptance. Thus, *autonomy* in SDT and *autonomy* in language education have different focuses: one on learners' ability and the

other on motivation and psychological needs. In this paper, I use *learner autonomy* to refer to autonomy in language education to differentiate from *autonomy* defined in SDT; however, it is inevitable that these two concepts of autonomy merge in some contexts as they are intertwined. Indeed, learners require inner endorsement (autonomy) to take charge of their own learning (learner autonomy). In addition, some of the abilities described as being part of learner autonomy are often illustrated as competence in SDT. Therefore, Reeve's (2016) "autonomy-supportive teaching" approach, which uses SDT principles and supports psychological needs (including both autonomy and competence), resembles the ideas for promoting learner autonomy in language education. Hence, the autonomy-supportive leadership course illustrated in this paper incorporated both perspectives and aimed to develop both learner autonomy and autonomy of LC leaders.

Communities of Practice in Self-Access Centers

Since social perspectives emerged in our understanding of learner autonomy, SACs have come to be recognized as social learning spaces, whereas they were previously often considered solely as learning resource centers for individuals. A social learning space is, in essence, a place where "learners can come together in order to learn with and from each other", whose purpose is to "promote active, experiential, and social learning" (Murray & Fujishima, 2013, p. 140). One of the approaches for creating social learning spaces in SACs is providing opportunities for learners to form communities and assisting them in becoming Communities of Practice (CoPs). Wenger et al. (2002) described CoP as the social learning process that involves people sharing a common purpose, interests, passions in a subject, and/or concerns, and working together to deepen knowledge and solve problems. According to Murphy (2014), not all communities are CoPs; the members need to achieve collaborative control of the community through social interaction with a strong motivational aspect (e.g., shared passion) and exercise learner autonomy in order to become a CoP. Since one of the main missions for SACs is to promote learner autonomy, learner autonomy can be considered to be a common aspiration for both CoPs and SACs.

Although social perspectives have highlighted the importance of social interaction and interdependence in SACs, there is not much research on learners engaging in communities with shared motives in the field of language education (Murphy, 2014), However, some studies have investigated SACs' dynamics and roles from CoP perspectives (Hooper, 2020; Murray & Fujishima, 2013; Mynard et al., 2020) and illuminated the benefits of student-led LCs in SACs (Acuña González et al., 2015; Magno e Silva, 2018; Watkins, in

press). The studies illustrated student-led language LCs as places for mutual learning without the boundaries of English proficiency, age, and gender. Moreover, the studies showed how students gained new beliefs about learning, which involved enjoyment, creativity, and confidence-building. Additionally, Watkins (in press) explored her students' experiences in interest-based LCs by utilizing the self-determination theory (SDT) framework, and she found that these student-led LCs often create a need-supportive environment where the benefits surpass those related to a singular focus on the mastery of the language. Hence, by providing ground for CoP development, SACs may be able to bring learners not only the opportunities for social interaction in English but also foster learner autonomy with interdependence with other learners and increase learners' inner motivation.

Community Leaders' Roles and Student Training in Self-Access Centers

Previous studies of LCs in SACs have revealed students' ability to organize their own communities (Acuña González et al., 2015; Magno e Silva, 2018; Watkins, in press). Although not in a SAC, Gao (2007) illuminated learners' interactions in an outside-the-classroom language LC in China. Gao identified the crucial role of central figures of the community in reducing barriers to social relationships among students and maintaining the momentum needed to enhance learning experiences because of the community's fluid membership. Wenger et al. (2002) also described the fluid nature of membership in CoPs, which contrasts with a traditional team or class where peripheral involvement is usually discouraged. They suggested that the leaders need to design communities that allow members to alter their engagement at different stages. Additionally, Watkins (in press) investigated LC leaders' roles and actions that supported community members' psychological needs. Leaders adopted several active roles, such as removing boundaries between members, involving learners in the decision-making process, offering choices, and giving positive feedback, which increased the members' autonomous motivation for learning and community participation. Moreover, she reported the positive impact of advising skill training on a leader of a popular community. These leaders' roles, actions, and skills appeared to be closely related to autonomy-supportive teaching approaches (e.g., Reeve, 2016), which enhance students' autonomous motivation.

Although it became apparent that leaders played an essential role in facilitating community members' autonomous motivation and sustaining LCs, no studies about training community leaders in SACs were found. Moreover, Beseghi (2017) suggested that the concept of leadership is rarely discussed in the literature of language learning environments.

This may be because LCs' development is often an organic process, and leadership within these communities emerges naturally without being appointed and trained first. For example, Acuña González et al. (2015) described their development of English conversation groups in their SAC as "a gradual discovery of approaches leading to a better system of working that has led to developing a community of practice" (p. 319). Moreover, they explained that student conversation leaders were not often proficient English speakers initially; rather, they increased fluency or confidence through their community participation. Therefore, the training for LC leaders has to be flexible and adaptable in order to facilitate their organic process of leadership development.

One way to examine leadership training in SACs is by drawing on SAC staff training. Many SAC advocates have described the involvement of the students in SAC organization as essential because it allows students to be more self-reliant and prevent them from becoming merely a customer of the SAC (Aston, 1993; Malcolm, 2004). Therefore, student staff are often hired for various roles, including managing resources, organizing activities, tutoring, peer mentoring, and handling counter and administrative tasks (Fujishima, 2015; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Kanduboda, 2020). Since these student staff, either paid or unpaid, perform tasks and roles which are assigned and directed by SAC managers, their roles are different from LC leaders whose purpose is organizing a community for learning with their own goals and interests. However, SAC student staff are generally SAC users themselves, and they often engage in SAC projects that create learning opportunities for others in the SACs as part of their roles, which resembles the LC leaders' roles. From the views of SACs as social learning spaces, Thornton (2015) suggested that student staff have critical roles in developing a sense of community among SAC users. Furthermore, Moore and Tachibana (2015) highlighted the importance of creating a CoP amongst student staff as one of the principles for staff training programs based on their experiences. Their other principles include tailoring the roles and training contents to individuals and identifying and respecting their personal learning phases. Although training contents may depend on SAC staff and leaders' roles and tasks, these principles are versatile for any situation to foster individuals' learner autonomy and autonomous motivation.

The Study

Purpose of Study

In this article, I explore five language LC leaders' experiences of taking an autonomy-supportive leadership course. Through their narratives, I will analyze these student leaders' learning needs for organizing a community in a SAC and the course contents that influenced their leadership styles and beliefs. Since student leadership and CoP perspectives have not been investigated enough in language education, I hope that this study will shed light on the possibilities of student-led communities in SACs and how to foster their autonomy-supportive skills.

Context

This study was conducted at the SAC of a Japanese university specializing in foreign languages and cultures. The facility includes various types of English learning materials and purposeful learning spaces, as well as various language learning support services. Eleven full-time learning advisors offer individual advising sessions and self-directed language learning modules and courses to learn and practice skills to be an effective language learner (Curry et al., 2017; Watkins, 2015). Over 30 students are hired for administrative tasks and peer advising, and numerous core SAC users voluntarily contribute to the SAC through student-led events and LCs.

The leaders of the LCs are the participants of this study. About ten interest-based communities, with a size of three to thirty members, are organized each semester by students. They hold meetings each week, where members acquire content knowledge (e.g., pop cultures, social issues, languages) and/or skills (e.g., digital arts) while using English or another foreign language such as French or Spanish as a learning/communication tool. Some communities have been organized for more than three years, and the leadership role has been passed on from the previous generation, while some communities have become inactive within a semester, which was part of impetus for me to create this course. The community members exercise learner autonomy while voluntarily participating in their chosen communities, and the communities tend to feature an autonomy-supportive learning environment that appears to promote persistence and enjoyment in learning (Watkins, in press). The community meetings are normally held in the SAC; however, they were online during this study due to the coronavirus pandemic. This situation gave the leaders new challenges since they had to find alternative ways to organize their meetings, and this was reflected in the narratives that appeared in this study to some extent.

Course Design

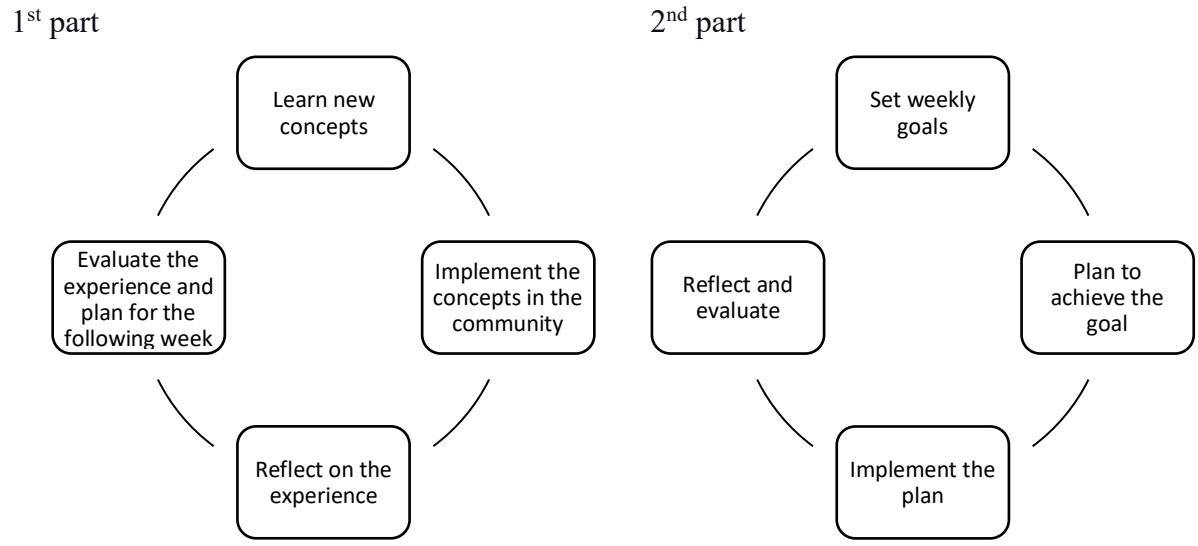
The course's main aim was to help the leaders organize sustainable LCs by assisting them in becoming autonomous and autonomy-supportive. The course consisted of two parts. In the first half of the 15-week semester, the leaders learned new theories and concepts, which included:

- vision statements (the golden cycle model was adopted from Sinek, 2009);
- basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000);
- autonomy-supportive leadership (Deci & Flaste, 1996; Reeve, 2016);
- CoP (Tarmizi et al., 2006; Wenger et al., 2002);
- leadership styles (e.g., Griffin & North-Samardzic, 2020); and
- advising skills (Kato & Mynard, 2016; McCarthy, 2009).

In the second half, they set their own goals for their community and worked towards the goals. For both parts, the course design drew on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Learning Cycles



Moreover, conscious reflection was at the core of this course. It is the critical element of the cyclic learning process and the psychological development of learner autonomy (e.g., Boud et al., 1985; Little, 1991). This course also followed Moore and Tachibana's (2015) principles for SAC staff training in that it was self-paced and individualized and done outside the classroom. The leaders submitted their journals every week after completing their

learning cycle. Then, I provided weekly written advising on their journal, which consisted of questions to deepen their reflection and helped them to evaluate the experience. There were also individual advising sessions with me, as well as group workshops and a final reflection paper. The course was only offered to the LC leaders at the time of this study, under the umbrella of the SAC's self-directed language learning modules. Course enrollment was the voluntary choice of the leaders, and they received one credit upon completion. Due to the pandemic, all meetings were via Zoom, and we used Moxtra, a collaboration and communication platform, for the journal annotation and exchange.

Methodology

Data Collection

All five leaders who took the course participated in this study (see Table 1). Although it was not my intention, all the participants' LCs were language-focused and not content-based, and three participants were co-leaders of the same community. Previous to this course, the participants and I had an established relationship as I am the LC coordinator of the SAC, and we talked regularly. Thus, they were somewhat familiar with my advising approach and were used to receiving questions rather than being told what to do.

The two collected narrative data were individual interviews and the final reflection papers. The interview was about an hour and conducted in Japanese. I chose the open-ended and semi-structured style to cover the key concepts while enabling participants to develop their ideas and express themselves naturally during the interview. Recordings of the interviews were then transcribed. The final reflection was about 500 English words, and the students addressed five reflection questions (see Appendix A for the questions). The key concepts addressed in the interviews and reflection paper were the same. The reason for using the two instruments was for triangulation to increase the validity of the data; the data were collected from the same participants but in two different forms at different times. Prior to data collection, I obtained ethical approval from the university, and participants were given a description of the research and signed a research consent form.

Table 1

The Participants

Name	Role	LC membership

(pseudonym)		
Karin	2nd generation co-leader of a language LC	About 10 core members
Riko	2nd generation co-leader of a language LC	About 10 core members
Seiya	2nd generation co-leader of a language LC	About 10 core members
Mika	2nd generation leader of a language LC	About 5 core members
Nami	1st leader/creator of a language LC	About 8 core members

Data Analysis

For the analysis, I read the narrative data (transcribed interviews and reflection papers) multiple times and coded the transcripts using an interpretive approach via NVivo, a qualitative analysis software. The emergent themes and codes from one individual's stories were then compared with the others' stories to identify the interrelationships. Lastly, I elaborated on the ideas to answer my questions while spontaneously consulting the literature to remain sensitive to the participants' stories and deepen the understanding of their experiences. Upon writing this paper, I translated the excerpts from the interviews from Japanese to English, whereas I used the participants' original English writing from the final reflection paper. The translated excerpts are indicated as (translated) in this paper. The excerpts that appear in this study have been edited for word economy (for instance, false starts and repetitions have been deleted). Moreover, I conducted member checking interviews with the participants to share my provisional analysis and confirmed they are comfortable with my translation and interpretation.

I chose narrative analysis for this study because narratives provide rare insights into participants' experiences and emotions which are difficult to observe in authentic forms (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Ma & Oxford, 2014; Pavlenko, 2002). Because of the small sample size and subjectivity, the aim of a narrative study is not to generalize the findings to other contexts (Wertz et al., 2011). Therefore, I would like to suggest that the findings illustrated in this study were experiences shared in this specific context; under our unique relationship, the interviews were co-constructed and interpreted by myself.

Findings and Discussion

Collaborative Leadership: Learning to Rely on Others

All five leaders stated that their ideas about ideal leadership were altered from taking the course. Their prior notion of leadership was somewhat autocratic. They felt under

pressure to possess skills and knowledge above the other community members and take responsibility for all community management. Thus, after learning about different leadership styles and realizing that some leaders utilize collective wisdom from others' knowledge and experiences, they became more comfortable and confident in developing their own leadership styles and relying on other members. Seiya wrote:

> I had a mindset that community leaders should lead a discussion and have enough knowledge to give advice to members. This belief was broken […] I realized there is no one concrete form of a leader and we can create our own leadership style. It was new to me and my pressure was gone.

Similarly, Nami wrote, "Before I take the course, my thought of being a leader is that I have to organize the group by myself without any help from other members and have the responsibility to contribute more than the other participants." Mika and Riko explained that they had a pre-existing leadership image from the leaders they had met previously in their social life experiences, such as club activities and part-time jobs. Riko wrote:

> I also wanted to be a leader who is good at leading. However, I could know there are some types of leadership through this course. Thus, my belief was changed by this course. I think I am better at supporting members than leading the community.

Interestingly, when they learned about different leadership styles, all the leaders found democratic, transformative, and/or autonomy-supportive styles to be ideal and suited to them. It appeared that this was due to the collaborative nature of the LCs. Seiya said, "the purpose of my community is not teaching but to learn together. So, if the leader was like 'come follow me!' it doesn't suit the purpose, and it will be like another class" (translated). Additionally, Karin explained:

> I realized that the way of a leader organizing a community makes the atmosphere of the community […] it is important for us to listen to members' voices and create the community together […]. This way makes the best part of [community's name] which is a kind, warm and friendly atmosphere.

Furthermore, all leaders discussed the value of collaborative leadership. For example, Nami explained that she learned how to ask for help, including showing appreciation and giving positive feedback which described what was helpful after receiving support from community members. In this way Nami's approach appeared to promote the psychological needs-fulfillment of those she relied on. Others also described their practical needs for collaborative leadership, which coincidently were congruent with an autonomy-supportive approach. Mika explained, "when a new member joins, I worry, and I pay a lot of attention to

provide care for the person […] it is necessary, but I could not see the whole community anymore and things did not go smoothly" (translated). This need for community leaders to support learners who are new to a space is described as essential by the studies of LCs (Balçıkanlı, 2018; Watkins, in press). Thus, Mika eventually asked for help and delegated tasks, and this concurrently worked to promote members' learner autonomy. Mika said, "I did not have to ask anymore […] it started to change. The members do not just participate, but they started to contribute (to the community)" (translated). Seiya, Riko, and Karin shared their leadership position since they jointly took over the role from a previous leader. They knew the value of collaborative leadership, which Riko described as "having three different perspectives and filling each other's gaps." However, they also learned that sharing the responsibilities between themselves was not enough. Karin wrote:

> I noticed that we could ask members what to do when we do not know something. We had discussed how to solve problems with just three of us before taking this course. But we learned that it is better to rely on members, and that would grow our community's autonomy.

Beseghi (2017) explained collaborative leadership as the "result of a collaborative effort, where responsibility is shared by everyone […] collaborative leadership is about the process rather than people" (p. 309). These concepts are also key characteristics of CoP, such as mutual engagement, shared artifacts or repertoire, and development of personal relationships and ways of interacting (Wenger et al., 2002). Therefore, collaborative leadership appeared to be particularly relevant in the LC context, and the concept appeared to be beneficial for the leaders. Moreover, the students' narratives suggested that they had limited knowledge and experience of leadership and appreciated the opportunities to explore different leadership styles so that they might develop their own.

Need-Supportive Roles

Another theme that all leaders mentioned was linked to SDT's concept of basic psychological needs. Nami said, "when I recalled the times when I felt motivated for studying, club activities, etc., it was the time that my three needs were met. It made a total sense to me" (translated). Karin and Seiya also stated that they felt that this theory resonated with them. The SDT and autonomy-supportive approach to facilitating basic psychological needs became a guide for organizing their communities. The idea of improving the community was abstract for the leaders; however, focusing on increasing the members' sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence allowed them to adopt sensible approaches and

implement new ideas. Nami, for example, talked to an individual who was quiet in the community and suggested the positive effects that the person could bring to the community if she spoke up more. Nami said that members' participation and engagement improved when she "planted autonomy seeds" in individuals.

Additionally, Seiya, Karin, and Riko used the theory to improve their community's time-management issue. Time-management for learning activities in breakout rooms on Zoom was a big challenge for them. Seiya explained, "Initially, the leaders managed the time, and members just followed our announcements. However, the system has been changed because we realized we needed to cultivate participants' autonomy." In the beginning, the members were unable to complete the activities in breakout rooms within the given time. After several tries, the leaders told the members that they could decide the activity flow depending on their needs and wants - and it worked. Seiya said, "it created a more relaxed atmosphere. They were able to control the time and how much detail they want to discuss" (translated).

The leaders highly valued such learner autonomy in their communities. Karin suggested, "we don't practice what we were taught in the way that we were taught (like a classroom); we practice saying what we want to say in the way we want to say" (translated). On the other hand, Karin explained the necessity of scaffolding when allowing the members to exercise their autonomy. Karin said, "they do not know what to do when given total freedom. We need to make roads for them to some degree…" (translated). Kushida (2020) suggested that many Japanese students have teacher-directed educational backgrounds meaning that they are often new to the concept of learner autonomy. Therefore, some studies such as Croker and Ashurova (2012) suggested introducing tasks to scaffold the students to be active members of their SAC community and exercise their learner autonomy. Like Karin's example, the leaders reflected on their experiences and critically developed some ideas similar to those presented in existing literature (e.g., affordance for learners to exercise autonomy; Benson, 2011).

As one prior study of the LC leaders suggested (Watkins, in press), the leaders identified feeling of relatedness in communities as essential even before participating in the course. However, through the course, they were able to set specific weekly goals connected to fostering their community's relatedness and worked toward them. Riko explained that fostering relatedness of the community increased the number of core members. She identified "empathizing," "questioning," and "finding commonalities between herself and the person" as social strategies that she used, and she hoped to improve social skills more. One additional point of relevance is that empathizing and questioning are advising skills that the leaders learned in the course, and the leaders appeared to practice using these skills to support

members' psychological needs while taking the course. Regarding competence, Karin and Mika believed that language gain is strongly associated with it; however, they were not sure how to enhance the members' language learning opportunities. Thus, content related to social skills and SLA may be useful additions to the course materials.

Additionally, since all three basic psychological needs are interrelated (Watkins, in press), one improvement contributed to the others. For example, Karin indicated that "when we developed a better relationship, the members became more confident and spoke up more, then they felt competent." Similarly, collaborative leadership contributed to all three psychological needs (e.g., members were involved in the decision-making process; thus, they felt more related and competent). Seiya wrote, "I always emphasized we need your voices to improve the community […] participants actively gave their opinions toward the community, and it led to the participative community." These leaders' narratives indicated that their communities were not just a group who learned the same subject together; they became CoPs in which students collectively defined their practice and exercised collaborative control as a community. Moreover, it appeared that the leaders' effort in creating a need-supportive environment while taking the course contributed to the CoPs' continued development.

Reflection: Developing Confidence, Ownership, and Metacognition

The five leaders highly valued the opportunities for reflection. Seiya said, "there were many deep questions in the course. I had to analyze my community, and I have to see myself critically to answer them" (translated). He also suggested that he would have done the same things repeatedly and not challenged himself without purposefully reflecting on his experiences. Mika also indicated that "since we are actual leaders and have our communities, there was a place to implement our new learning and ideas from our reflection. The thinking and implementing cycle was good" (translated).

Additionally, practicing the learning cycle and pushing themselves to reflect gave the leaders a sense of accomplishment and helped them become more confident about their actions and leadership. For example, both Riko and Karin described their vague sense of dissatisfaction they often had after the meetings, which they did not face until the weekly reflection made them do so. Riko said, "through writing my journal each week, I became clear about what I needed to work on and how" (translated). Moreover, it had been a year since Riko, Karin, and Seiya took over the control of the community, but I noticed their community ownership development that semester. Previously, I somewhat had the impression that they were organizing the community on behalf of the previous leader;

however, gradually the community became truly their own. For example, it was from this semester that the co-leaders scheduled a weekly meeting to discuss their community. When I talked about my impressions to the three leaders, they all agreed. Karin described the experience:

> There was a previous leader's mold for the community, and we were relying on it, it was not original […] I had to observe the community, clarifying the problems, thinking about ideas, trying out the ideas. That experience built my confidence. (translated)

Furthermore, the leaders' narratives showed some evidence of developing metacognition. Nami suggested that "when I was asked questions from the perspectives that I did not see before, I found new ways about my thinking" (translated). Mika said reflection after receiving the advisor's comments was her "most powerful learning moment." She explained:

> There is a limit that I can think by myself, but when I was asked questions, I noticed a lot. […] I had two views before, a leader and the members', but I learned the importance of seeing the community from the third person perspective […] from outside of the community. (translated)

These narratives indicated that although the leaders likely had an ability to reflect to begin with, they required systematic prompts to generate deeper reflection to solve their problems and improve their community.

Conclusion

In this study, I attempted to illustrate the student community leaders' needs and the transformation of their beliefs through taking my course, which aimed to support the leaders to be autonomous and autonomy-supportive. Before taking the course, the five leaders had a pre-existing image of a leader who took all responsibilities and exercised full control of every facet of the community. This conceptualization of the leadership role put them under pressure. After learning about different leadership styles, they became more confident and comfortable being themselves and identified that autonomy-supportive and collaborative leadership was better suited to their communities. Moreover, learning about psychological needs and an autonomy-supportive approach gave the leaders focus and a guide for improving their community. These leaders' efforts for creating a need-supportive environment also facilitated the process of their communities becoming CoPs. While practicing such leadership and exercising learner autonomy, critical reflection was essential.

Through the experiential learning cycle, the leaders developed confidence in their approaches, gained ownership of their communities, and explored their meta-cognition. The area for development of this course appeared to be adding contents related to effective language learning. The participants indicated that improving language skills strongly connected to feelings of competence for community members; however, they were unsure about how to enhance the members' learning opportunities. Moreover, introducing social strategies to increase the sense of relatedness in the community would be another area to explore.

This study was a small-scale, one-semester study which may only show a part of the leaders' stories. Also, because of narrative studies' subjective nature, my findings are specific to my context, relying on my relationship with the leaders and my role as course instructor. However, due to a lack of studies in student leadership (Beseghi, 2017) and CoP perspectives (Murphy, 2014) in the field, I hope that the implications from this study become useful for those who wish to increase student-led social learning opportunities in SACs.

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Appendix A

Final Reflection Questions

1. How did the course challenge your beliefs about LCs and/or leadership? Please explain with an example(s).
2. Were there any positive or negative changes to your community due to what you learned in the course? Please explain with an example(s).
3. Have you made any changes to your leadership and approach in your LCs due to what you learned in the course? Please explain with an example(s).
4. What was your most powerful learning moment while taking this course?
5. What kind of difficulties do you still have as a LC leader after completing the course?