

## **Teacher-learner Autonomy: Ideas for Conference and Workshop Design**

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### **Biographical information**

Andy: I've been teaching in Japan about 10 years, and, earlier, in Yugoslavia (6 years) and France (2 years). Interests: teacher development, learner development, drama, and vocabulary. Richard: I've been in Japan for 12 years and am about to move back to the UK. I'm currently interested in learner autonomy, teacher development, appropriate methodology and history of language teaching.

### **Abstract**

Our starting position: If teachers are to take charge of their own development - that is, exercise teacher-learner autonomy - we may need to re-consider our views not only about teaching but also about our learning of teaching. In this workshop report, we present some ideas for enabling teacher-learner autonomy via conferences. In particular, we consider how conference formats can be adapted towards structured, participatory forms of collegial exchange, and towards experiential-reflective learning.

### **Introduction**

Andy: Below we report on a workshop at TDTR4 for teachers and teacher educators involved in - or simply interested in - conference and/or workshop planning. Overall, we follow the format adopted at the workshop itself: first, some autobiographical background which serves to explain our own interests in innovative ideas for conference design; second, some ideas from our own practical experience; third, some theoretical considerations relating conference design to teacher development; and finally, further suggestions from participants at TDTR4.

### **Our experiences**

Richard: We have both developed an interest in the design of conferences and workshops on the basis of voluntary work within JALT (the Japan Association for Language Teaching). In fact, we followed rather similar routes within JALT: Both of us started out at the grass roots level as programme chairs for local chapters, where we were involved in organizing day-long mini-conferences as well as monthly presentations (Andy for Ibaraki chapter, Richard in Gunma and later Tokyo).

Andy: We then became SIG coordinators and newsletter editors, which was how our paths crossed (I was coordinator of the Teacher Education SIG, while Richard was joint coordinator of the Learner Development SIG).

Richard: A group of us set up the JALT Learner Development SIG in 1994. We occasionally arranged local 'get-togethers' of members in people's houses, and bilingualism became a major focus of attention at these gatherings, as well as in our newsletter. Reasons for this focus were that we were trying in the SIG to enhance opportunities for participation by Japanese as well as English-speaking members, and, second, we were also attempting to focus on our own development as language learners. We explored both aspects via ideas such as attempting to reflect back in the other language what a particular speaker had said. Our first local mini-conference was in 1995 in Shizuoka, where there was a balance between Japanese and English presentations, with bilingual abstracts, and a final 'bringing it all together'

session which allowed space for participants' evaluations and sharing of reflections on the spot, via individual comments displayed as posters (on which anyone could write a response), and group discussion.

Andy: A formative experience for me, prior to getting involved in JALT programmes, had been in Yugoslavia, where in the 1980s the annual lectors' conference had brought together 100+ teachers for 3 or 4 days of group workshops. On the first day participants chose a sub-theme of the main conference theme, divided off into one of 3 or 4 groups, and then worked through workshop activities around that theme. Each sub-group reported back to the plenary conference on a daily basis, and gave a final presentation of the group's thinking and ideas on the last day to the whole conference. These final report-backs often employed poster presentations and drama. Plenary speakers also took part in the conference (there were 2 or 3 plenaries), so there was an interesting blend between plenaries and near total participant-centredness. The conferences were run and equally initiated across the three major national groups taking part (Yugoslavs, Americans and Brits). Write-ups for a nation-wide newsletter were encouraged and supported, too.

Richard: If we go back now to the shared context of how JALT conferences normally worked, I remember in particular certain frustrations connected with the organization of Tokyo JALT mini-conferences. These frustrations had to do with the workload involved, which fell on few shoulders and was not compensated for by a particularly positive response on the part of participants. There were outside pressures from publishers for good 'advertising slots', and organizers (including myself), presenters and conference-goers alike seemed to assume that the provision and consumption of pre-packaged ideas was the 'name of the game'.

Andy: I think we both came to feel quite frustrated with certain aspects of the way JALT conferences normally operate. We were eager to develop formats which better reflected the new ideas relating to learner autonomy and teacher development with which we were beginning to grapple in our respective SIGs.

Richard: We cooperated in the organization of an attempted innovative mini-conference (termed the 'Meiji Action Workshops' below) in Tokyo in 1996; some of the ideas from this experience and our ongoing discussions were later incorporated into the design of the annual JALT International Conference in 1998, where Andrew was programme co-chair (with Joyce Cunningham, Haruko Katsura and Neil Parry), and where I helped brainstorm ideas, speakers and possible changes in the Call for Papers and the conference presentation formats. We'll look at some of the innovations developed for this large-scale conference later in this article.

Andy: For the moment, though, we'll present some excerpts from an e-mail discussion we and others had in the run up to and following the Meiji Action Workshops in 1996. This was the first time for us to address problems of innovative conference design explicitly, and describing this experience in more detail here will enable us to identify some particular issues of developing concern later.

Richard: Here, then, are some excerpts from a 'multi-perspective genealogy' (previously published as Aoki, Barfield, McMahill and Smith 1996), which describes the genesis and some of the innovative features of the 1996 Teacher/Learner Development Meiji Action Workshops.

Richard: The idea for these workshops came about [in 1995], through the coming together of various people's interests in exploring the interface between learning and teaching, in

ourselves and in our students. In organizational terms, members of the Learner Development and Teacher Education [SIG] committees started out (via e-mail brainstorming) with the intention of attempting a different kind of event, not just for the sake of it, but for specific reasons several of us seemed to agree on:

Cheiron [McMahill]: Let's try something totally new with formats. I am tired of the usual papers and workshops and demonstrations, aren't you? How can we make the medium the message? How can participants become active generators of ideas from the beginning?

Richard: I'm also tired of the typical structure of conferences and agree the medium should be the message – we can't get away from expert-centred ways of thinking (even if what we're . . . talking about is learning-centred approaches) unless there's change in the hierarchical structures of teacher conferences.

Andrew: Something without speakers or totally participant-centred. . . .

Naoko [Aoki]: Planning something that's totally different from usual conferences. That was an exciting idea. We also agreed in the very beginning stage that the event would be bilingual to secure equal participation by Japanese and English speaking people. Our project, however, was not without a problem. During the course of e-mail brainstorming which was carried out exclusively in English, I felt overwhelmed by the amount of writing . . . There was a language barrier which I hadn't known existed.

Cheiron: We succeeded in sharing responsibility for planning a conference and in doing it bilingually to an extent that is rare in any multinational group. We showed that a group of Japanese and non-Japanese people all over Japan could organize a conference almost all through e-mail, and largely reach consensus on the goals and process. . . Some of the problems we had along the way can also be lessons . . . As Naoko points out, virtually all the e-mail conversations took place in English . . . Another tendency all of us faced was being able to put off replying to e-mail or making decisions on e-mail in a way we couldn't do in a face-to-face meeting. Perhaps e-mail should be supplemented with at least one meeting at a key time. We need to see each other's eyes and hear each other's voices at times to achieve more sympathetic communication.

Andrew: We tried something new, we involved a lot of people, we had ups and downs on e-mail and telephone calls, we didn't discuss everything bilingually, we enjoyed ourselves, we learnt a lot, . . . we brought together a lot of interesting people, and we created a new kind of one-day conference: process learning, with all our strengths and weaknesses!

Richard: For me, the process of e-mail brainstorming and coming to consensus in joint creation of an innovative event was a valuable learning experience in itself, and this excitement can perhaps only repeat itself anew (for others) if future events are arranged with fresh minds! I feel, however, some of the innovations we did achieve are worth recording: 1) non-hierarchical, consensus-oriented decision-making process: a sense of shared responsibility for the event, involving workshop facilitators as [conference] organizers; also, 2) a majority of participant-centred workshops involving experiential learning; 3) bilingual publicity and a bilingual final session; 4) a small (human) scale, non-profit-making event (we didn't make a loss, either!).

## **Issues emerging, and a larger scale response**

Andy: Things become more challenging when similar ideas are applied to a national conference for 2,000 people. On the basis of our experiences prior to the JALT 98 International Conference, several issues had emerged which we had already attempted to address on a small scale, at grass roots level. When I was approached to be programme chair for the much larger-scale JALT 98 conference, my first thought was to accept, if I could work as a member of a team with people that I knew. Luckily, Joyce Cunningham and Neil Parry (whom I knew through the Ibaraki chapter) and Haruko Katsura (a Teacher Education SIG colleague) agreed to be programme co-chairs. At the same time, I was aware that I would be involved here in a very different ball game, where multiple interests would have to be balanced. (This went together with an enthusiastically naïve energy for change!) Below, Richard will try to summarize some of the most salient issues that had emerged from our previous experience, and I will attempt to indicate how these were addressed in some of the JALT 98 Conference programme decisions.

Richard: The first issue arising seems to be that of sharing responsibility for conference organization, planning by consensus, making the organizing of the conference itself a fun, learning process for those involved, rather than a 'burning-out' experience. You've already indicated how you got together a team of programme co-chairs. How did that work out in practice, and were there any other innovations in this area?

Andy: The four of us were able to work both face-to-face and virtually over e-mail as a team for over a year, with neither mode of communication outweighing the other in the decisions that we needed to make (and we later extended this to making arrangements for editing the proceedings of JALT 98). I think the biggest single change we made was to decide among ourselves and make clear both at national JALT meetings and over e-mail that we wanted to open up the planning of the conference, and take account of other people's ideas and suggestions. At one point, for example, we had an e-mail brainstorming cc. list of about 50 people, who basically re-wrote the content areas and formats of the conference, as well as suggesting lots of interesting ideas to try.

Richard: The second issue would perhaps be attempting to enhance cross-cultural appropriacy and equal opportunities for participation. (In our context this involves, particularly, issues of bilingualism, and encouragement of Japanese/non-Japanese collaboration.) What was done in this area for JALT 98?

Andy: First, we revised the Call for Papers extensively, and tried to make it more bilingual, and easy to follow (in both English and Japanese), as far as space and organization would allow. We included messages encouraging would-be presenters to prepare a one-page bilingual summary for their sessions, so that speakers of other languages would be more fully included. We also agreed to make sure that all the major speakers would be introduced bilingually at the conference. We further decided that profiles of speakers in the pre-conference publicity and handbook would be written in informal, first-person experience-based, bilingual, collegial style. We were very keen that the public face of the conference should be relaxed, presenting a consistently bilingual teacher-to-teacher appearance. At the same time, we wanted all the time to show that the conference was being co-organized according to ideas, feedback, and concerns that people had voiced at previous conferences, in meetings, and over e-mail. However, English remained the major language for communication among organizers, and this is an issue that remains to be addressed.

Richard: The third issue might be the one which has most universal relevance, beyond the JALT context. How to move away from expert-centred, top-down type formats, and towards

more participatory presentations which facilitate networking and active learning. Can you summarize what happened in this area at JALT 98?

Andrew: The idea of 'opening up' the conference horizontally also extended to such matters as including new presentation formats in the Call for Papers – 'exchange' and 'guided discussion', for example. 'Guided discussion' was conceived as an open-ended session where the presenter would simply highlight the importance of a particular theme, along with central issues and points for discussion. He or she would then act as a facilitator of group work and open discussion of the theme at the conference itself. In addition, group presentation formats were especially welcomed, and 'forum' organizers encouraged to experiment with new formats: combining simultaneous poster presentations, for example, with one-to-one as well as group discussion of these posters, thus providing space for reflection and networking.

Richard: You've mentioned some innovative formats for 'typical' presentations, but the issue of the role of plenary speakers also seems to be a crucial one, if we're talking about making the conference as a whole more 'horizontal' and bottom-up. Publishers or other agencies often sponsor speakers to come from the 'centre' to deliver recent gospel to the periphery, and conference organizers have to take advantage of this, for financial and publicity reasons, don't they?

Andy: Yes and no - publishers are willing to support new ideas and formats, but they are probably more likely to support, say, the author of a popular textbook than an educational figure who can't be linked to textbooks. For JALT 98, we deliberately looked towards the edges (both thematically and geographically) and tried to bring in non-centre speakers, encouraging SIGs to sponsor their own speakers in some cases. For JALT 98, Leni Dam, from Denmark, Amy Tsui, from Hong Kong, and Hannah Pillay from Malaysia remain in my mind as examples of how the centre/non-centre balance *can* be shifted, and how the concerns and interests of conference attendees can be well-addressed by teacher-researchers working in other apparently peripheral contexts. With two of the plenary speakers, Richard and Haruko took the new idea of 'Exchange' sessions one stage further at JALT 98. They collaborated with Leni Dam and David Little in running a bilingual 'special' exchange session, which was initiated and run wholly according to the previously expressed concerns and questions of participants. This was done by eliciting written feedback relating to the plenary and other presentations by Leni and David over the preceding two days; see Dam, Little, Smith and Katsura, 1999). Another example would be the final forum of the conference (in place of a final 'panel of experts'), which saw 10 invited speakers paired off and working with groups of 30 or so participants in discussion style, before they re-grouped centre-stage for a goldfish bowl discussion based on what they had discussed in their smaller groups. Two other important aspects here were that each of the 10 speakers came from a different country, and that the gender balance was equal.

### **A pause for reflection: Some 'grounded theorizing' of conference design**

Richard: Above we have presented some issues and ideas for teacher-conference design which have emerged in our own situation. Here we will attempt to clarify better why we've been doing what we've been doing. This will involve some post-hoc rationalizations, or theorization from practice, which may help others to generate ideas appropriate to their own contexts. I'd like to start this off by emphasizing that we've both found participation in teacher associations (in our case, JALT in particular) to be central to our own development as teachers. In cases where in-service teacher training is not provided or is insufficient, teacher associations can, we have found, provide a valuable alternative or additional source of

support, via workshops, special interest networks, newsletters and conferences. However, the activities of such associations don't seem to have received the theoretical attention they perhaps deserve. It seems legitimate to consider, for example, how the experiential-reflective teacher education paradigm may or may not be effectively incorporated into the activities of teacher associations, for example in the organization of conferences. I'd suggest, in fact, that such conferences are often set up hierarchically, reflecting top-down, 'applied science' or craft ways of conceiving teacher-learning, and not an experiential-reflective paradigm (see Wallace, 1991, pp. 2–17).

Andy: This top-down question is largely structural and may relate as much to the conference size as to the structure of the teacher association itself within its own context. I think if we consider the decision-making process that occurs in the lead-up to larger conferences, we may have another way in to what we're trying to formulate here. My impression is that larger conferences risk alienating conference-goers, forcing them to adopt passive participatory roles simply because so much planning and decision-making must happen beforehand for such an event to be put on. The decision-making structure somehow encourages hierarchical roles and modalities.

Richard: You raise the issue of roles there. Could you explain that a little more?

Andy: I've begun to think that we in fact take on, whether we realize it or not, roles such as being the paying but non-involved consumer conference attendee or the harried conference provider, volunteer, or presenter. And from another perspective, the busy-ness of larger conferences simply reinforces the busy-ness of our lives as teachers, and diminishes further the space or time we need to nurture for reflection.

Richard: At the same time, let's accentuate the positive, from our experience of attempting to develop alternative modes of organization and formats, especially within the SIGs and at JALT 98. I did feel there we managed to create a sense of shared responsibility and space for reflection. Reflecting back in a different language, for example, struck me as a valuable technique from the point of view of slowing down the tempo and enhancing reflection.

Andy: I understand what you're saying. Tell me more about the question of space.

Richard: Perhaps other ways to look at different types of conference are in terms of interaction spaces and sensory modalities. Many conferences predominantly exploit an auditory modality, presenter-centred and delivery-style, with little sense of interaction. Like in an airport, we're channeled from one place to another, to the next 'waiting area' where we silently bear witness to the experience and ideas of the next presenter, yet remain detached and uninvolved in sharing and developing our own explanations. If we accept that our own students not only have needs for interaction but also multiple intelligences and various learning styles, we need to bring those insights into arrangements for teacher-learning at conferences or in workshops. Having said that, what's important may be how different types of interaction, and different modalities can be combined, enriching 'typical' conference formats, rather than getting rid of or over-emphasizing any one, particular approach.

Andy: I'd like to add, too, that what you're saying creates pictures in my mind about creating and sustaining new communities of explanation. We could see a conference as a community rather than an event, a process of explanation and learning rather than a set of presentations delivered to the attendees. We could move our understanding of what a conference is towards a 'space for participants' and away from a 'programme full of presentations'. I'd like to insert a quotation from Donald Freeman here:

In reflective teaching, when teachers interact, they are creating new communities of explanation. . . . These communities often differ from the dominant or prevailing explanations in their work settings . . . [You] need someone to talk to about your work and in that process, you explain your work so that it will make sense to him/her. But this changes the work itself: by putting words on or into it, you are making it different. .

..  
My point is that explanation shapes practice; the way you define it shapes what you do about the issue. And likewise new ways of making sense breed new forms of teaching. . . .

Sustaining new forms of explanation is primarily a matter of belonging. You remain connected to [the] group because you are sustained by its explanations... and vice versa. The group makes the explanations work for you. (Freeman, 1997, pp. 64-65)

In retrospect we seem to have been looking for new forms of explanation for the particular community that our interest in trying to connect teacher development and learner autonomy has led us towards. We've tried, if you like, to engage our understanding in practice by nurturing new conference formats.

Richard: That makes sense to me. And it leads me to try to clarify the first part of the title we've given to this workshop report: teacher-learner autonomy. This relates directly back to our attempts in our respective SIGs to view ourselves as learners, and to consider our own autonomy as teacher-learners in a variety of areas, both for its own sake and as a basis for ongoing and future work with students. I've written about this elsewhere (Smith, forthcoming). Basically, what I've been trying to reflect on is how as teachers we can become more autonomous in our own learning. Teacher-learner autonomy, just like 'student' learner autonomy, can be seen as:

a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person. An autonomous learner is an active participant in the social processes of learning, but also an active interpreter of new information in terms of what he/she already and uniquely knows (1989 'Bergen definition', cited in Dam and Little, 1999, p.127)

Andy: In a nutshell, then, what are we trying to formulate here?

Richard: I'd say that in relation to teacher conferences, one thing centrally at issue is: how can we become less dependent on experts, and more dependent on ourselves?

Andy: Right. Change comes from within, in cooperation with other teachers.

Richard: Yes. And in practical terms, this entails the question: how can conference organizers enhance rather than (unintentionally) deny teacher-learner autonomy, providing better opportunities for shared decision-making, collegial sharing of experience, and reflection on experience for participants, presenters and themselves as organizers? In short, how can we begin to replace a top-down 'applied science' model with a 'reflective model' (Wallace 1991) in our attitudes to learning through conferences?

## Over to you!

Richard: What we've said so far explains the rationale for the TDTR4 workshop. We didn't go into so much detail there, and we provided most of our own ideas on a handout at the end, but the main message, I think, was made clear at the beginning to workshop participants: our belief that conventional, top-down conference structures might contribute to frustrations and disempowerment among teachers rather than enhancing teacher-learner autonomy, that is, control by teachers over their own development. One reason for arranging the workshop was to see whether this perception might be shared by others in different contexts. I was pleased that workshop participants seemed at least to sympathize with our premises, to see some value in discussing a variety of ways conference design might relate to teacher development, and to share readily their own ideas for innovation.

Andrew: We finish, then, by opening out the discussion with some notes both from the TDTR4 workshop and the overall conference round-up session which followed (where several points were made which seemed relevant to the concerns of this article). We hope that these notes might form the basis for a wider, ongoing discussion.

Richard: The workshop attracted 18 participants from the following countries: Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, France, Israel, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland and the UK. Following a brief introduction, five groups, each composed of three to four members brainstormed 'issues' (areas for possible improvement) deriving from their own experiences as conference participants, presenters and/or organizers, and then moved on to plan 'innovative solutions' on this basis. Each group chose a spokesperson to present their ideas in plenary, with the help of overhead transparencies.

First, Eryl Griffiths (speaking also for Jane Clifford, Krista Knopper and Manuela Malhado) mentioned a number of ideas currently being discussed within IATEFL for the improvement of its own annual conference. These include: exploiting e-mail and WWW media before the conference to help intending participants (a) get to know one other; (b) get to know the conference programme; and (c) think about the conference theme in advance. After the conference, e-mail would be used for networking among participants. At the conference itself, new arrangements might include ways of bringing those in similar teaching situations together, ensuring that there is time for discussion following input-style presentations, and encouraging presenters to prepare full handouts to save on note-taking. Eryl also mentioned desires for quick publication of the proceedings (even in somewhat 'rough and ready' form), and for semi-organized structures and sites for socializing after each day's work at the conference. In connection with the top-down nature of conferences, 'super-star swan-ins and swan-outs' were to be discouraged.

Next, Antionete Celani (speaking also for Anne Lattul and Kyoko Nozaki) reported on how her group had considered the issue of alternative formats for conferences in some depth. Some suggestions were quite radical, including replacing individual papers altogether with open discussions on particular themes, and using drama, art and/or dance to introduce 'critical incidents' and to provoke questions and comments. In this group there was also some questioning of the value of having plenary speakers at teacher conferences at all.

Manuel Luna Fuguera (speaking also for Riva Levenchuk, Ann Jonckheer and Susana Pascual Safont ) next described how in his group discussion had focused on how to go about planning a conference. Emphasis was placed on the need to establish and define clearly a central topic,

from which everything else would proceed. This group also emphasized the social side of things, recommending guided tours, and effective welcome arrangements, while financial and aesthetic aspects were not ignored: conferences should be held in attractive, comfortable, accessible locations at an affordable price.

Taking up the theme of financial burdens, Maria Alfredo Moreira (speaking also for Janet Atlan, Susan Barduhn and Julian Edge) suggested that part of conference fees be used to fund participants who would not be able to attend otherwise. Taking the theme of mutual support and mentoring a stage further, this group also suggested that inexperienced presenters could receive support in the preparation of talks and workshops from conference organizers or special interest groups. This group, then, identified the issue of access to and equality of participation within conferences as a serious one, having earlier been overheard also to be discussing issues of bilingualism and native speaker (of English) domination of discussions and presentation slots.

Finally, Wouter Van Damme (speaking also for Marleen van Balen and Terry Loughrey) suggested some further improvements. Several of these related to a perceived need to enhance opportunities for networking among conference participants. Questions of time arose here – time for discussion both during and between presentations – and a strong recommendation was made for sufficient opportunities to be provided for participants to get to know one another at the beginning of conferences. Another suggestion in this area was to attempt to gather and publish in advance short biographical statements from all participants (not only presenters), while a final recommendation was that workshops could be arranged specifically on good practice in presenting, to help teachers gain confidence to submit proposals for future conferences themselves.

We end this section with some comments noted down during the panel session which ended the TDTR4 conference as a whole. These seem, from another perspective, to confirm the importance of the theme of conference design which we have been addressing here.

Julian Edge: We're not short of conferences where technical aspects are covered in a top-down manner. Practitioners should remain the focus of TDTR conferences.

Lily Orland: Yes, it's time to look at other fields where practitioners are at the centre.

Julian Edge: There are two discourses evident at this conference: those of research into teachers, and teacher development (a counter discourse). Supporting the latter discourse is important, at conference level.

Brenda Hopper: [In a conference like this], could we build in structured opportunities for sharing of reflections? . . . How can we create space? How can we use a conference like this to model support for reflection and sharing of power?

### **Conclusion: Workable ideas for the future**

We're glad to have had the opportunity to present our ideas at TDTR4. We realized that we and our colleagues in Japan are not alone in our desire seriously to consider issues of appropriate conference and workshop design. In fact, we would like to propose that, whereas in the past many good ideas relating to the organization of teacher-conferences may have been left unrecorded, in the future it might be possible to gather and share some of the best ideas of

TDTR4 participants and (other) Teacher Development SIG members active in or interested in conference and/or workshop design. For this purpose, we simply sign off, with our e-mail addresses, in the hope that you might wish to contact us with your own responses and ideas, which we would then try to help disseminate further:

Andy : <andyb@sakura.cc.tsukuba.ac.jp>

Richard: <richard@srv0.apl.ed.ac.uk>

### **Acknowledgements and apologies**

We'd like to add that by voicing some problems above and describing solutions we adopted and which others have suggested, we by no means wish to denigrate conference organizers, past or present, who devote endless hours of their time for such volunteer work. Nor do we wish to claim that the solutions we attempted were by any means ideal or solely invented by us.

Finally, our apologies to TDTR4 participants whom we were unable to contact if they feel we have 'put words into their mouths' in the above report.

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There was no page numbering in the original. In the CD-ROM (no longer available), the article was accompanied – in a separate part - by the following abstract (exact reproduction):

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*Andrew Barfield, Richard Smith*

**Abstract:** Our starting position: If teachers are to take charge of their own development - that is, exercise teacher-learner autonomy - we may need to re-consider our views not only about teaching but also about our learning of teaching. In this workshop report, we present some ideas for enabling teacher-learner autonomy via conferences. In particular, we consider how conference formats can be adapted towards structured and participatory forms of collegial exchange, and towards experiential-reflective learning