

Practical applications of Postmodern Theory for promoting learner autonomy in a foundation studies program

Brian Curtis

Introduction

In his 1986 treatise entitled *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard famously describes postmodernity as an *incredulity toward metanarratives*. This description illustrates the kind of fetishism with which cultural studies theorists have always latched onto buzzwords. But it is the telling subtitle of this same book - *A Report on Knowledge* - that hints at some of the shared concepts between theories of postmodernity and independent learning. This paper illustrates that, while postmodernity may eschew metanarrativity, it undeniably embraces the concept of *metacognition*. While *noticing* may be a buzzword among the learner-autonomy set, it has distinct corollaries within the jargony world of postmodern theory. Other terms and concepts such as *deconstruction*, *self-reference*, *agency* and even Foucault's *discourse on discourse*, all point to common bonds between the theory of postmodernity and the theory and practice of facilitating learning in a university preparation environment. This paper not only highlights some of the commonalities between the two fields, but it also proposes some ways in which the disciplines can be combined and applied in an independent language learning setting.

Every year, thousands of overseas students pour into Australia and New Zealand with the hopes of improving their English and securing a place in an international university. At the same time, thousands of native English speaking students crowd into the popular lectures and tutorials of the contemporary English literature programs in the same universities. It is a peculiar phenomenon that there is little correlation between what goes on within university English language centres and English departments throughout Australasia. Though these disciplines have a language in common, there is a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between them in terms of the theory that underpins the practice of teaching and learning. While intensive English programs and foundation studies programs are focused on helping students learn the skills, language and independence that they will need at the university level, many contemporary English literature programs have abandoned the practical aspects of language study in favor of vogueish developments in critical and postmodern theory. In many respects, it would seem that coordinators of university preparation programs for international students and chairs of English literature departments would have even less to say to each other than their students. But such need not be the case.

I came from a background in cultural studies and critical theory research in Australia before I found myself transplanted into the role of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in an Australian university in Vietnam. Having had the chance to experience the educational approach from both sides of the academic fence, I am interested in dispelling the misperception that theory and practice across the disciplines have nothing in common. More than just demonstrating how teaching and learning methods from one area can be applied to the other, this paper seeks to highlight the ways in which the two disciplines of language learner autonomy and critical postmodernity are, to risk a cliché from the latter, *always already* similar.

By and large, the broad brushstrokes with which I paint the major principles of postmodernity will be recognized as oversimplified by the duly initiated. Likewise, the ideas and practices of learner autonomy theory as applied in RMIT Vietnam's University Preparation Program, and as mentioned in this paper, are not new or revolutionary to those already practising in the field. They are (or should be) familiar territory to any teacher of EFL. What is worth noting is not the novelty of theoretical explanations or the practical examples, but the parallels that lie between them.

Background

RMIT International University Vietnam

The original foundations for RMIT Vietnam were laid in the early 1990s, when the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology initiated a feasibility study into the possibility of opening an annex campus in Southeast Asia. During this era, many Australian universities launched offshore projects in the region, including Monash University, the Curtin University of Technology and Swinburne University which established campuses in Malaysia and Thailand to complement their domestic international student programs. Along with projects in Singapore, Hong Kong and mainland China, RMIT sought a suitable

location for an English language school and university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's commercial capital.

The campus in downtown Ho Chi Minh City was opened in 2001, with a class of 30 English prep and degree students. As of October 2003, RMIT Vietnam had a total of 800 students across all degrees and programs in three locations in the city centre, with a 13-hectare campus scheduled to open in Saigon South in 2004. The university offers undergraduate degrees in commerce and information technology (IT), as well as graduate and postgraduate courses in education and business administration. There is a pre-degree English language school, with classes from the beginner to advanced levels, including English for Academic Purposes (EAP), test prep and teacher training and certification. In addition, RMIT Vietnam offers a popular bridging course called the *University Preparation Program*.

All classes at RMIT Vietnam are conducted in English, and the use of English is actively promoted outside the classroom as well. The majority of the student body is Vietnamese, but there is a growing population of students from other countries including Laos, Cambodia, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Australia, Denmark, Canada, France and the United Kingdom. As with most universities in Australasia, students need a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 before they can enter the degree program. This is in addition to minimum achievement test scores in Year 12 of the Vietnamese national education system (or equivalent). The academic staff is primarily expatriate, with a minority of foreign-educated Vietnamese nationals. Curricula, syllabi and courseware are developed by academic staff at RMIT in Melbourne. As such, although the content is delivered offshore with local adaptations for context, the undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are awarded by RMIT in Melbourne. The students see this as highly advantageous. The first set of undergraduates are due to graduate in 2004, whereupon the true value of their international education will be reflected in the quality of job offers they get. RMIT Vietnam remains the only international university in Vietnam.

University Preparation Program

RMIT Vietnam's University Preparation Program (UPP) is designed to bridge the gap between the very different learning environments of Vietnamese secondary schools and an Australian university. It is a two-semester course based on the Foundation Studies Program of RMIT in Melbourne. Students may enrol in UPP by two routes: successful completion of Level 5 (upper-intermediate) at RMIT Vietnam's English language school or an IELTS score of 5.5. Upon completion of UPP, students are guaranteed a place in RMIT Vietnam's degree program or at RMIT in Melbourne. UPP is a very popular option for students because it means they can proceed into the degree without the requirement of scoring 6.5 on the IELTS. In addition, there is a reciprocal arrangement which gains UPP graduates automatic admission at a number of participating universities in Australia.

The University Preparation Program offers students a pre-degree knowledge and skills foundation for IT and commerce majors. It comprises two semesters each of four integrated courses: Academic Language, Professional Communications, Information Management and Computers and Networks. The program is intended to introduce general academic study and communication skills, as well as give a broad overview of some core content that both sets of majors might encounter in their degrees, and to a lesser extent in their working lives after graduation. Anecdotal evidence from the academic staff in the degree programs suggests that UPP students are indeed much better prepared for study in the first year of their degrees than students who enter by other means.

Postmodern Theory

Although the term *postmodern* was used as early as the 1850s, it was not until the late 1950s that Rosenberg and White (1957), Drucker (1957) and Mills (1959) all illustrated a contemporary shift from the state of modernity to a new state of postmodernity. By the early 1970s, Hassan (1971) had offered a basic treatise on the tenets of postmodernism, and the term began to come into widespread usage both within academic and elite cultural circles. Since that time, the term has become an overused buzzword, yet there continues to be little agreement as to what postmodernity actually entails. In his now famous proclamation, Lyotard (1986) defined postmodernity as *an incredulity towards metanarratives*. Like his forebears in the 1950s, Lyotard characterized postmodernity as an epochal shift in society, but later investigations (Curtis, 2002) have brought to light that this sort of explanation relies heavily on the same sort of metanarrativity that the postmoderns supposedly put to rest. To some, the *post* in *postmodern* may refer to a fundamental rupture with modernity, a leaving behind and moving on but that smacks too much of the same ideal of progress that postmodernity theoretically abnegates. Instead, the *post* can best be understood as an inscription: *All that modernity was, and much more besides, is*

fully inscribed within the postmodern. Within its borders, postmodernity includes all the social structures that were modernity, only in a much more disorganized manner. As Lash and Urry (1994) claim: *postmodernism is not so much a critique or radical refusal of modernism, but its 'radical exaggeration'.*

Despite the fact that the debate continues to rage regarding postmodernity's definition, chronology and causality, some common themes and practices have emerged among theorists of the postmodern. Informed by the academic fields of cultural anthropology, structuralism, Marxism, Saussurian semiotics and later poststructuralism, the study of postmodernity has always concerned itself with investigating products of culture. In particular, Postmodern Theory is interested in the interpretation of the signs and symbols of the cultural marketplace, and how these symbols resonate within social structures. Within the hallowed halls of university English literature departments, postmodern critical theorists in training are taught how to read everyday cultural products (ordinary objects and occurrences such as a soap opera or a professional wrestling match) as though they were *texts*. Ferdinand de Saussure was a structuralist semiotician, which is to say that he was into linguistics. The fact that so much of contemporary Postmodern Theory is based on his work on language (1959) is seminal in the idea of investigating the link between postmodernity and language learner autonomy.

Learner Autonomy Theory

There is probably as much confusion and disagreement about what is meant by the term *learner autonomy* as there is about the concept of postmodernity. Although it has taken many names and forms, the idea of learner autonomy really began to take hold in the theory and practice of pedagogy in the 1970s (Dickinson 1987, Holec 1988). Whether we are talking about self-directed learning (Knowles 1975), student autonomy (Boud 1988), learner-managed learning (Long 1990), independent learning (Knight 1996) or learner autonomy, we are for the most part talking about the same thing. As there have been a number of quite useful definitions put forward for the concept of autonomy in pedagogy (see Benson 1997), it is beyond the scope and purview of this paper to re-cover this well-trodden ground. Instead, what is worth noting is the timing of the advent of contemporary learner autonomy theory. With both of them coming to prominence in the 1970s, it is not my aim to prove that postmodernity caused learner autonomy, or vice versa. Rather, it is the contention of this paper that theories of postmodernity and learner autonomy are inextricably linked, each informing and informed by the other, resulting in practice and applications in both fields that mirror each other in an endless cycle of reflection.

Postmodernity versus Learner Autonomy

PM: Postindustrial Information Society

In Ernst Mandel's *Long Waves of Capitalist Production* (1997) he puts forward his theory of cultural periodization, in which monopoly capital begets modernism. This argument states essentially that the condition of modernity is a result of the latter stages of the Industrial Revolution. In Jameson's (1984) reworking of periodization, he highlights the ways in which postmodernity can be considered the *cultural logic* of late capitalism. That is, during the late capitalist period of the 1960s to the 1980s, there was a shift in the modes of economic production from industrialism to postindustrialism. Castells (2000) has pointed out how this shift from the production of goods to the production of information has had profound effects not only on production, but also on consumer and labor patterns. This increase in information has led to a proliferation of media forms such as radio and TV stations, magazines and newspapers and internet sites. In this way, it can be seen that more and more people have more and more access to more and more information than ever before in history.

LA: Learning Society

During the same era, there was a shift in pedagogical ideals from students focusing on learning facts within a classroom setting to gaining knowledge across a wide variety of situations and frameworks. Schön (1971) was an early advocate of the concept of *lifelong learning*, in which students continued their education in and out of class. The idea was to move away from the model of Baconian fact-finding in favor of an approach which would allow students to learn in all areas of their lives. Students would then be able to apply their newly-gained knowledge in any context. Ranson (1994) has pointed out that this shift toward a *learning society* coincided with what Giddens (1990) termed the *Juggernaut of Late Modernity*. This timing also corresponds nicely to the shift towards a postindustrial information society.

In RMIT Vietnam's University Preparation Program, we have purposefully set out to create an atmosphere conducive to the formation of learning communities. As most of our students come from a Confucian cultural and educational background, the first step in this process is to shift their focus from learning by rote memorization to the demonstration of understanding. Practically, this has been approached by altering assessment schemes away from multiple-choice and short-answer questions, to essay questions. However making this transition is still very much a work in progress. The ideal result of this shift in focus is that students should be able to apply the skills and knowledge they learn in UPP to contexts in their undergraduate degrees and/or their future careers. In this way, it is hoped that they will be able to internalize their learning experiences, making connections to their real lives, and perhaps even developing a personal interest in the subject matter.

PM: Audience Agency

One of the defining characteristics of modernity was the pervasion of mass culture. Theorists of the resultant mass society saw the atomization of modern subjects in a sprawling and disconnected mass being bombarded by one-way messages, and declared this uniform cultural dissemination as insidious and omnipresent. Whether this situation ever really existed is not so important as the fact that by the late twentieth century postmodern cultural transmission had taken on a whole new form. According to Lash and Urry (1994), the changes in the postindustrial economy toward production of information gave rise to an increasingly agential audience. In their terms, the very individualization that gave rise to atomization in the mass communications structures of modernity have resulted in a process in which *agency is set free from structure, a process in which, further, it is structural change itself in modernization that so to speak forces agency to take on powers that heretofore lay in social structures themselves*. Schudson (1984) concurs with this interpretation, showing that as consumers gain access to more information, the agency of those consumers is expanded. The effect of this expansion is that, as consumers' agency increases, so too does their ability to offer a unique and individual interpretation of the information being consumed. This interpretive ability goes a long way to evening the power structure of cultural production.

The practical upshot of all this is that postmodernity has seen a great increase in the choice of media for consumption. But more than that, the modes of production have also been opened up with an easing of access to media creation. Like never before, individuals have been granted access to multimedia and web production, community television, independent radio and small-print publishing.

LA: Internal Locus of Control

As learning communities developed, the intrinsic motivation of individual learners increased. At the same time, there was a concerted movement away from the concept of a teacher-fronted classroom to a student-centered learning environment. Students, not teachers, became the focus of the learning experience. Brookfield (1987) has noted that learner engagement with the materials and the methods is the key to developing student ownership of the learning process. This has a snowballing effect, as the more invested in the learning experience students feel, the more control they have. In turn, the greater the level of control, the higher personal stake the students put into their learning.

In UPP, we address these issues from the first day of classes. In Vietnam, there is a great tradition of paying respect to teachers. Even the title of teacher (*thầy*) in the Vietnamese language does double duty as one of the most respectful pronouns of personal address. Without trying to erase this well-established culture of obedience, RMIT staff promote themselves not as teachers but as *learning facilitators*. In this way, we are not claiming to be the source of all knowledge, but as resources who can aid in the students' own acquisition of knowledge. There are a number of ways in which the academic staff try to encourage increased student agency, including student-selected topics and assignments, self-evaluation and peer assessment and student-initiated learning contracts, in which students develop their own set of learning objectives for a class, in concert with their personal goals and expectations. Outside the classroom, student agency is promoted by a student-run English on Campus movement aimed at addressing RMIT Vietnam's unique situation as a Western university in a non-Western setting. In addition, there is voluntary participation in the Higher Education Language Program of concurrent tutoring and a student-monitored Learning Resource Centre, both of which can be accessed by students independent of their regular course requirements.

PM: Lignes d'éere

Michel de Certeau (1984) refers to the *wandering lines* drawn by individuals tracing their own path through the cultural landscape. He says that people make their own meanings through cultural

consumption, developing into, in a sense, *secondary producers*. In discovering their process of production through consumption, they become interconnected in a self-constituted group. Maffesoli (1996) talks about the emergence of new urban *tribes* focused around the mediated consumption and appropriation of cultural products. Developing their own codes of meaning and membership, these tribes co-opt the signs and symbols of mainstream culture, making them their own. All of this is a result of increased access to information and heightened audience agency. This has been confirmed by Benjamin (1968), who sees that *the greatly increased mass of participation has produced a change in the mode of participation*. In this view, readers of cultural texts gain access to authorship.

LA: Learning Communities

There is well-documented evidence that student learning potential increases as their mode of participation changes. If a student makes a transition from reception to production of new material, that student's understanding will increase dramatically. In a famous study (Lazear, 1990), it was shown that students retain 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear and 30% of what they see, but they can recall 70% of what they discuss with others and 95% of what they actually teach. Martin (2002) notes how students develop self-constituted learning communities by this process of *learning through teaching*. In this situation, students cease to be merely learners, and are transformed into *secondary teachers*.

To promote the formation of these learning communities at RMIT Vietnam, the University Preparation Program tries to provide a number of opportunities for students to work together and learn from each other. A large focus of the first semester communications course is planning and delivering group presentations. These skills are used continually by students to present chosen topics to the rest of the class. In the second semester, students develop the techniques they need to lead tutorial discussions. Most students coming from a Vietnamese educational background have little experience of working on group projects, so UPP pays a lot of attention to collaborative learning skills, allowing the students to form their own project-oriented study groups. In addition, students are encouraged to contribute to asynchronous discussion boards and e-collaboration with each other and with Foundation students in Melbourne, allowing them to extend their learning communities beyond classroom and national boundaries.

PM: Intertextuality and Rhizomatic Structure

With self-constituted urban tribes giving their own interpretations to cultural products, eventually two things happen: these disparate tribes start to communicate their interpretations to each other and the newly adapted products of culture begin to reference one another.

In a seminal work of postmodern theory, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) talk of the organic formation of new social structures. Using an analogy from the world of horticulture, they refer to a new rhizomatic structure which connects individual agents, as well as their tribes, to each other. Some species, like peanuts and aspen trees, do not have individual root systems. Instead, all the individual plants are connected underground, united by root nodes or rhizomes. In the same way, Deleuze and Guattari see postmodern social structures as lacking traditional hierarchy, with individual agents all connected to each other without central coordination or organization.

But these decentralized, rhizomatic structures are not unique to plants and people. Increasingly in postmodernity, cultural products themselves are interconnected in nodal relationships. Kristeva (1986) talks about *coordinates of dialogue*, in which cultural products are informed by and allude to each other. In this way, agents from one tribal node can communicate to another tribal node, and these coordinates of dialog breed intertextuality. In the world of popular culture, examples of this effect can be seen when a TV show mentions a popular song, a song talks about movies or a movie mentions a videogame. Perhaps the best example of intertextuality, though, is the internet, which is built on a massive web of references, with hypertext links connecting all concepts. Like postmodern social structures, the worldwide web has no central hub.

LA: Integrated Curriculum

Many people have pointed to the value of increasing cross-disciplinarity in the classroom, especially in forming knowledge relations among learning communities and across areas of study (see Kovalik and McGeehan 1999, Reigeluth 1999, Barab and Duffy 2000). This arrangement allows the knowledge and skills learned in one class to be immediately applied to another topic. It also leads to a situation in which all theory leads to practice, and practice can always be supported by theory.

Because student enrolments are still relatively small and students have only two choices of degree majors, UPP at RMIT Vietnam is able to integrate its curriculum much more so than the streamed Foundation Studies Program in Melbourne. Here, presenting, reading, summarizing and teamwork skills from Professional Communications are used in all other classes. The paraphrasing, synthesizing, researching and citing/referencing skills from the academic language course are used in each of the other classes. In addition, software applications and internet skills from Computers and Networks and Information Management are used in all classes throughout the program.

PM: Author is Dead / Unveiling of Artifice

In his famous essay *The Death of the Author*, French theorist Roland Barthes (1977) declares that a cultural text must cease to be associated with its originator. Taking the concepts of reinterpretation and secondary production to their extreme conclusions, Barthes contends that the author could no longer be considered the force that creates meaning in a text. Barthes's conclusion is that the meaning of a text can only be determined by the multiple relations and interpretations of people interacting with that text. In this view, there is no *re*-interpreting and there is no *secondary* production, because the meaning of a cultural product does not exist in the first place. It is only produced upon the first act of consumption.

This revelation can be compared to Dorothy throwing open the curtains and discovering the truth behind the Wizard of Oz. If the author really is a myth (or worse, dead), then surely the artifice of cultural production has been exposed. Wilde (1981) emphasizes this by discussing the artifice of a cultural product: *As artifice the work of art is a conscious tautology in which there is always an implicit (and sometimes explicit) reference to its own nature as artifact*. This is why postmodern cultural products, from advertising to architecture, acknowledge like never before their own status as artificial constructs.

LA: Educational Transparency

When teachers present themselves as facilitators of learning, not necessarily experts with all the right answers, they are doing something analogous to revealing their own Wizards of Oz behind their lecterns. And while they may be unveiling the artifice behind the myth of teaching, hopefully they will never put themselves into a position where they have to claim that the teacher is dead. In his paper on the educational possibilities of transparency, Fenech (2001) invokes the work of Habermas (1981) and his theory of communicative action. In Fenech's view, an increase in communication between teacher and student leads to a situation in which greater understanding can be achieved. He explains: *In the context of education, communicative analysis enables educators to move towards a transparency of knowledge-constitutive interests so that educational possibilities can be explored*.

In the University Preparation Program, we have investigated the effects of increased transparency in the teaching and learning process. At the very least, students have full access to course materials, learning objectives and assessment criteria for all their courses. These materials are made available to the students through in-class dissemination as well as online via RMIT Vietnam's distributed learning and knowledge management systems. In addition to this, some members of the UPP academic staff have experimented with projects in which students develop their own mediated marking criteria for individual assessment items. Other staff have opened up public access to their own reflective teaching journals in online web logs. It is through these open communication channels that teachers have unlocked the supposed secrets of their craft, creating an atmosphere of educational transparency.

PM: Self-referentiality

While postmodernity may have resulted in the death of the author, it has also produced a situation in which authors cannot help but claim out loud *I am dead!*. When cultural producers consider their own circumstances and unveil the artifice behind their own creations, it leads to a higher and higher degree of involution. This emphasis on the self is what caused Williamson (1978) to characterize self-reference as a hallmark of postmodernity. Lash and Urry (1994) have gone on to describe how the origin of today's reflexive individual lies in *an increasing pervasion of 'information and communication structures'*.

Now we have entered an era of hyper-reflexivity, in which it seems impossible to produce anything without a footnote referencing the methods of its very production. In books, authors such as Dave Eggers and David Foster Wallace do not even try to hide the *I* in their fictional works. At the same time, the Beastie Boys refer to themselves in their own songs, while actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger

and Keanu Reeves recite their familiar lines *I'll be back* and *Whoa!* with knowing winks, alluding to their own position as Hollywood superstars with trademarked catchphrases. This awareness of their own status has altered their mode of engagement.

LA: Metacognition

The discourse on metacognition is thick on the ground in educational circles, but by most accounts the term was coined by Flavell (1979) to refer to the idea of thinking about one's own thinking. More technically, metacognition refers to a consideration of, and active control over, the cognitive processes involved in learning. Schön (1987) refers to this version of metacognition as *reflection-in-action*, in which a student immediately engages in recursive thought *during* the learning process. He also refers to the after-the-fact *reflection-on-action*, in which students think *back* on what they have done to discover their own processes of learning. The result, in theory, is not only more well-informed learners, but also increasingly reflective agents, with self-awareness of their own status as students.

In UPP, students are encouraged to experiment with both types of reflection in order to improve their ability to consider their own involvement in the learning process. At the beginning of each course, students explore the learning objectives and outcomes for their classes, and map these on to their own self-perceived abilities and expectations. Students also get the chance to explore different aspects of their multiple intelligences, learning to recognize how they prefer to learn in certain circumstances. To make allowances for students with different learning propensities, assessments are not all based on writing, with components across all UPP courses providing students with the opportunity to be assessed by communicating visually or orally. In addition, a large part of the overall grade in the first semester Professional Communications course is the keeping of individual and collaborative learning journals. Students write these study reflections to gauge where they are in their learning, where they'd like to be, and how to get there.

PM: Bricolage and Jouissance

Invoking the French word for bricklayer, Lévi Strauss (1962) introduced the concept of the *bricoleur* who picks up bits of culture and reassembles them however he sees fit. These individual acts of bricolage are examples of what Baudrillard (1994) considers the fundamental acts of postmodernism, as the reflective agent is freed to *play with the pieces* of culture. Barthes (1977) saw these acts of recombination and described a condition in which these agents could take an almost orgasmic pleasure in playing with cultural texts. The joy, for the majority of postmodern subjects, lies in the breaking down and the building back up.

This behaviour can often be seen in the mode of protest adopted by postmodern activists. Members of the Birmingham School of cultural studies such as Dick Hebdige (1979) have illustrated that, on the streets of London in the late 1970s, punks coopted Scottish tartans and Native American signs and symbols, not to celebrate minority cultural heritage, but to playfully denounce the dominance of social orders that could keep such minorities down. More recently, contemporary advertising critics have create anti-ads and *subvertisements*, which take on the forms of real advertising, only to opposite ends. One can also point to a spate of recent demonstrations in which antiglobalists have recycle the logos of multinational corporations to use against them. When a postmodern protestor wears a T-shirt that says *McMurder*, this is an act of rebellion, but it is also an act of joyful bricolage, in which the original cultural texts have been destroyed and reassembled with new meanings.

LA: Deconstruction

This breaking down and tearing apart of ideas is what many postmodern theorists would term *deconstruction*. Coined by Jacques Derrida (1974) in his pivotal work *Of Grammatology*, deconstruction refers to a particular practice of reading with analytical inquiry. Within the context of UPP, we encourage acts of deconstruction so that students can get a view of the underlying and elemental structures of certain types of text. Before a student can successfully write an academic essay or put together a research report, we have them analyze how these different forms of writing are composed. These acts of deconstruction can be as simple as locating topic sentences from paragraphs and main ideas from essays, to making outlines from pre-existing pieces of writing. In the second semester, students take it a step further, identifying logical assertions and evaluating arguments plus classifying argumentative techniques. They also practise stripping the angle from news features before embarking on writing their own feature articles. Above all else, Derrida's work falls into the field of linguistics. As such, the applications for this field of postmodern theory are immediately apparent in a language-learning context.

In fact it is perhaps in the notion of deconstruction itself that the worlds of postmodernity and education come closest to overlapping. Some theorists, like Said (1979) and Foucault (1972) have bridged the gap between the disparate disciplines, pointing out that the idea of deconstruction itself is perhaps nothing more than an elaborate expression of a new didactic, *a poststructural pedagogy of the text*. Even further, Trifonas (2000) examines how Derridean deconstruction allows us to rethink the socio-historical and ethico-philosophical aspects of pedagogical practices and policies, including pedagogical theories that have had direct bearing on the ethical and cultural ideals forming the reason of Western educational systems, including the concept of learner autonomy.

Conclusion

In the University Preparation Program at RMIT International University Vietnam, Eastern students are introduced to a Western learning model. For better or worse, the role of UPP is to prepare them to learn in a completely new way. It is through the practical application of postmodern theories such as deconstruction that students develop the skills to use the component pieces of their education to build their own knowledge. In the end, the idea of constructing one's own knowledge is the fundamental precept of both learner autonomy and postmodern theory. In UPP we did not set out to create a postmodern curriculum with the purpose of producing independent learners. Rather, learner autonomy and postmodernity are and have been *always already* inscribed in each other. With both theories revolving around the independent construction of knowledge by autonomous agents, it is impossible to consider one without acknowledging the influence of the other.

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About the author

Brian Curtis is a member of academic staff at RMIT International University in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where his research interests include knowledge management in teaching and learning communities. He completed an MA in English/Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne and has previously worked in educational technology development at Microsoft in Seattle.

Email: brian-curtis@rmit.edu.vn