From Student to Community Leader: A Guide for Autonomy-Supportive Leadership Development

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Praise for *From Student to Community Leader: A Guide for Autonomy-Supportive Leadership Development* by Satoko Watkins and Daniel Hooper

The book *From Student to Community Leader: A Guide for Autonomy-Supportive Leadership Development* by Satoko Watkins and Daniel Hooper is a jewel for self-access center (SAC) coordinators and advisors. As its title states, it aims to develop students' leadership skills, especially for those with a role in SACs.

The volume comprises an Introduction, which sets the basis for the work it promises to offer. The personal explanatory text written by each of the two authors is a true lesson on the construction of knowledge. The introduction is followed by theories and activities drawn from many areas, such as growth, empowerment, and well-being. The way activities are planned contributes to mitigating power differences between stakeholders in the same environment. They focus on identity; communities of practice, in which peripheral agents are as important as the protagonists; advising; basic psychological needs; leadership styles, and the implementation of iterative reflective learning cycles. Finally, the third part brings ideas for connecting student leaders, in which readers can experiment with building confidence among a SAC team, for example. Diversity is the key to implementing activities that will suit a larger range of learners. The book also helps to select, develop content, organize teaching and learning situations, and analyze and evaluate materials and methodologies.

The book stands out for providing a model for leadership development based on sound and recent theories, which are presented to readers in a friendly manner. The authors suggest that instead of using the activities right from the book, users can adapt and select the ones more appropriate to their audience. The mantra present in each chapter is that reflection should be conducted after practice to develop new behaviors. The skills exercised in this book are not for language advisors or teachers or even for students alone. They are soft skills necessary to any career and preciously valued in the XXI century. In this sense, the volume points to an inevitable path of collective achievement; it is a route map to autonomy, understood not as an individual feature, like in the early 1980s, but as a socially based autonomy that leads to advancement, empowerment, and building of social networks. I would like to add that, as a side effect, practice done based on this book can turn into pertinent research, bringing new insights into this area.

Walkyria Magno e Silva, PhD
Federal University of Pará, Brazil

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Part 1. Introduction

Who are we?

Satoko

I changed my career from a university English Lecturer to a Learning Advisor at the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC)[1] of Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in 2013. My goal was to spend more time with individual learners and support their learning process. KUIS is a private university in Japan specializing in languages, cultures, and global liberal arts with a purpose-built SALC. It supports around 1,000 students' outside-the-class language learning each day. Our SALC aims to "facilitate prosocial and lifelong autonomous language learning within a diverse and multilingual learning environment" (Mynard et al., 2022, p.33) and offers various learning resources, spaces, and support. Learning Advisors' support, including advising and self-directed learning courses, is one of the core features of the SALC, and we help students develop ownership of their learning by promoting their reflections.

After working as a Learning Advisor and listening to my students' stories for a few years, my passion for supporting individuals naturally grew beyond language learning and became more about students flourishing. Through practice, I learned that social learning plays a great deal in learner motivation and empowerment due to the authentic use of foreign languages and the practicing of reciprocal learning behaviors. Thus, I supported various student-led activities, which include peer advising (Curry & Watkins, 2016), tandem learning (Watkins, 2019), events, and interest-based learning communities (Watkins, 2022). In interest-based learning communities, students who share learning goals (e.g., achieving particular scores on IELTS) and interests (e.g., social issues, pop culture, languages) meet regularly in the SALC while using languages as a learning and communication tool. The number of these student-led activities kept expanding, and soon, I started to feel my time limitation in supporting the student leaders and the communities. I needed to train the student leaders to take on my role of assisting other students as autonomous learners; therefore, autonomy-support will be carried on from me to student leaders and from student leaders to members of the communities, etc.

Hence, the "Autonomy-Supportive Leadership Course" was developed, which contained the activities introduced in this book (see Watkins, 2021 for details about the course). The course has been offered on a small scale for the last six semesters in the SALC and activities have been tested and edited. The course was only offered to learning community leaders first and then to SALC student staff. After seeing the student leaders' changes, three SALC administrative staff also volunteered to take the course, which, in my opinion, noticeably influenced the SALC atmosphere. Whereas the Learning Advisors are educators who specialize in learner autonomy, the norm of the Japanese education system is rather teacher-controlled (Egitim, 2022), and workplaces often take hierarchical approaches. Therefore, by the Japanese administrative staff understanding and experiencing autonomy-supportive approaches with the course, I could receive a new level of support on my projects from them. I could find visible changes in their working attitudes, such as becoming more confident in taking initiative on projects beyond administrative tasks and becoming even more accommodating to students. As I do not expect many universities to have interest-based learning communities, I imagine the most common student-led outside-the-class activities are extracurricular club activities (at least in Japan). These are often organized by school administrators and teachers who may or may not specialize in learner autonomy. Thus, the fact that our administrative staff found my course useful has built my confidence that the course content can be applied to other contexts, even within a hierarchical culture. Later, my wish to make the course more adaptable and spread the autonomy-supportive culture became possible when Dan, my former coworker with expertise in communities, joined the project of creating this book. I feel confident that, with your expertise and experiences, this guide will be more meaningful to your student leaders as well.

[1] We will use Self-Access Center (SAC) in the rest of the book as it is a more common term.

Dan

Within the relatively narrow purview of English education in Japan, I first saw the fostering of student leadership as one means to challenge what I believe to be a problematic relationship with "native speakers" and "native" English norms. If a student positions "native" English as standard, their English—and by extension their identity as a language user—becomes non-standard or simply not up to scratch. On the other hand, the mere presence of Japanese students acting as language learning community leaders that inspire and guide those around them throws the unhelpful hierarchical positioning of "native" and "non-native" into question and opens up new possibilities for learners' present and future identities.

With that, when Satoko kindly invited me to join her on this journey as co-researcher, practitioner, and writer, my eyes were opened to the sheer breadth of implications that student leadership facilitation can have. Rather than remain confined to my little world of language learning, I saw the potential of the training methods that Satoko developed in shaping positive leadership practices and identities across many facets of learners' lives. That being said, I confess that I did feel a certain degree of doubt regarding the applicability of leadership training beyond the progressive and autonomy-supportive environment in which Satoko developed her ideas. My institution, a small conservative university nestled in the Japanese countryside, is a world away from the culture from which these ideas were born. The students I work with often have limited English proficiency and the communities that they are involved in are, in many cases, completely unrelated to language learning. Despite this considerably different environment, however, I was startled to realize how accessible and effective the activities featured in this book were when working with learners at my university. Of course, flexibility and on-the-spot tweaks were necessary, but the depth of reflection that these activities catalyzed among student community leaders, both related and unrelated to language learning, could not be denied. I am sure that the readers of this book will share my experience and come to see the powerful impact that autonomy-supportive leadership training can have on the lives of our learners, wherever they are.

Aims and objectives of this book

When discussing the foundations of this book, one crucial question stubbornly reverberated in our minds: Who is this book actually for? An easy option would have been to settle on the low-hanging fruit: a guide for trained language advisors wishing to develop autonomy-supportive student leaders in self-access environments. While it is certainly the case that the contents of this volume are likely to resonate with this extremely specific subsection of educators, this also ignores the potential value of this type of leadership training to a broader landscape of learning. The more that we engaged in research and practice (Hooper, 2020a, in progress; Hooper & Watkins, 2023; Watkins, 2021, 2022) based on the principles and training that form this book, the more we realized how autonomy-supportive leadership permeated learners' lives far beyond our narrow field. We believe autonomy-supportive leadership training sets in motion a positive cycle that can manifest itself in countless ways along an individual's lifelong learning journey.

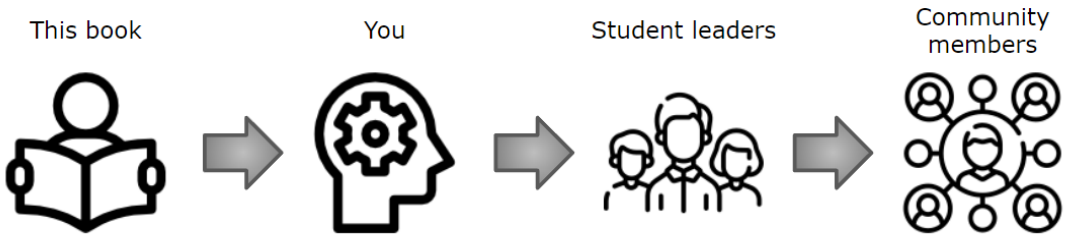
So, who is reading this book right now? We have chosen "student facilitator" as a catch-all term to describe someone who is striving to facilitate students' leadership development in an autonomy-supportive manner. This then begs the question, am I a student facilitator? What does a student facilitator do in concrete terms? What type of students do they work with? In what kind of setting do they work? We believe that being a student facilitator is not based on where you work, who you work with, or what learning your students are engaged in. Rather, a student facilitator is someone who recognizes and lives by autonomy-supportive principles and wishes the learners they work with to become empowered leaders rather than passive receivers of knowledge.

You could be a teacher, advisor, or administrator hoping to cultivate leadership skills or identities in either established or prospective student leaders. Alternatively, you might be hoping to foster and sustain student-led learning communities in your institution. Student-led learning communities come in a multitude of

forms, such as interest-based learning communities, circles, teams, volunteer groups, student workers, event organizers, and more. In addition, the principles that we outline in this book are by no means specific to language learning. Student communities encompass groups as broad as sports teams, volunteer groups, institutional staff, or support groups. Furthermore, concepts we address, such as communities of practice, basic psychological needs, and leadership styles have been applied to the medical or business worlds just as much as they have to language learners.

Overall, this reflects our belief that autonomy-supportive leadership support does not simply build successful language learners, but rather future leaders who can positively contribute to any field they enter. Furthermore, by reading this book, you are setting a chain reaction in motion (see Figure 1). To create a positive *emotional climate* (Goleman et al., 2013) conducive to learning, making sure that everyone has the chance to have their voice heard and prioritizing individuals' well-being are both pillars that cannot be overlooked. We are confident that, through the cultivation of autonomy-supportive student leaders, student facilitators are taking proactive steps to build more inclusive and egalitarian learning environments.

Figure 1: *The chain reaction of autonomy-supportive leadership training*



(Images: Flaticon.com)

The learning process that we are promoting in this book is based on a balance between external knowledge sources such as academic theory and the internal "knowing" and experience that learners bring with them from their learning histories. Both external and internal are equally valuable and can be regarded as lenses that amplify the effectiveness of each side. By analyzing past experiences based on an academic theory, we can gain new perspectives and insights into what we went through. On the other hand, by applying theory to concrete events (rather than vague academic abstractions), student facilitators can more deeply understand a concept and even challenge or adapt it based on our lived experiences.

By providing student leaders with opportunities to explore different theories and techniques that promote autonomy-supportive leadership, we believe that we are setting a positive cycle in motion. This is a cycle of autonomy-supportive learning that spans both time and space (See Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2: *Developing autonomy-supportive learning over time*

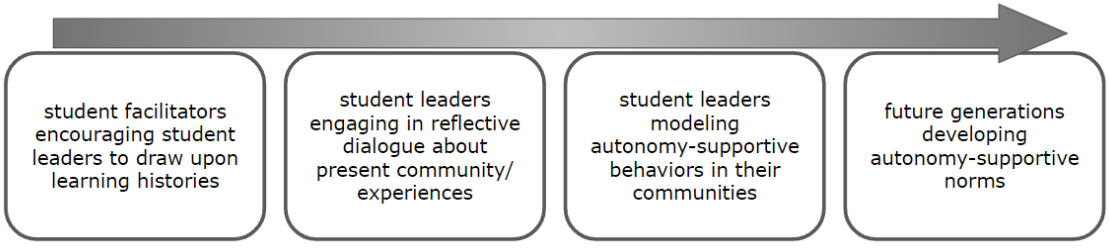
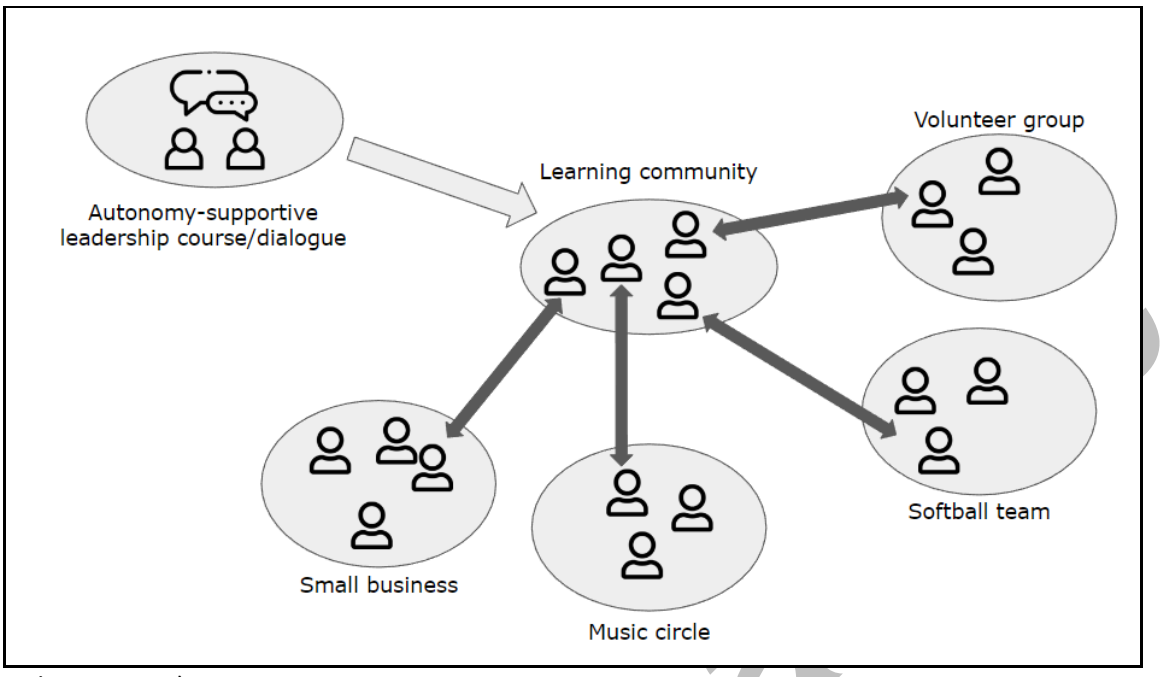


Figure 3*: Developing autonomy-supportive learning across space*



(Images: Flaticon.com)

If we look at this in terms of time, autonomy-supportive leadership skills empower student leaders in the present and continue to influence future generations of learners. A student leader of a learning community realizes the value of the other members' autonomy and well-being. This leader becomes a near-peer role model (Murphey, 1998) who inspires others based on their respectful and caring nature as well as their "nearness" in terms of status (as opposed to teachers or "native speakers" who may seem distant). Autonomy-supportive prosociality and mutual respect are contagious with other members aiming to be like the student leader (Hooper, 2020a; 2020b; in progress). The principles modeled by the student leader may even come to represent a key part of the domain (core characteristic) (Wenger et al., 2002) of a community reproduced across multiple generations.

The positive cycle we set in motion can also extend through space, permeating a wide range of communities in which learners participate. Although we may be initially engaging with them in a classroom, advising session, or Self-Access Center (SAC), the autonomy-supportive principles they explore do not get hung up on the coat rack when they leave. Participation in a community is not simply a matter of *doing* but rather *becoming*. Therefore, learners are not doing autonomy support, they are becoming autonomy supporters. This means that once learners have developed their understanding of what autonomy-supportive leadership is, and why it is important, they can apply this across a wide range of communities. In the case of Satoko and Dan, we have seen many of our student leaders apply the autonomy-supportive ideas that they explore in our courses in areas such as teaching, sports coaching, business, and the arts. Of course, this is a complex and multidirectional process with student leaders' learning based upon simultaneous experiences across multiple communities. As a result, we expect students' experiences in other communities to potentially shape our perspective on a given situation just as much as the activities we present in this book.

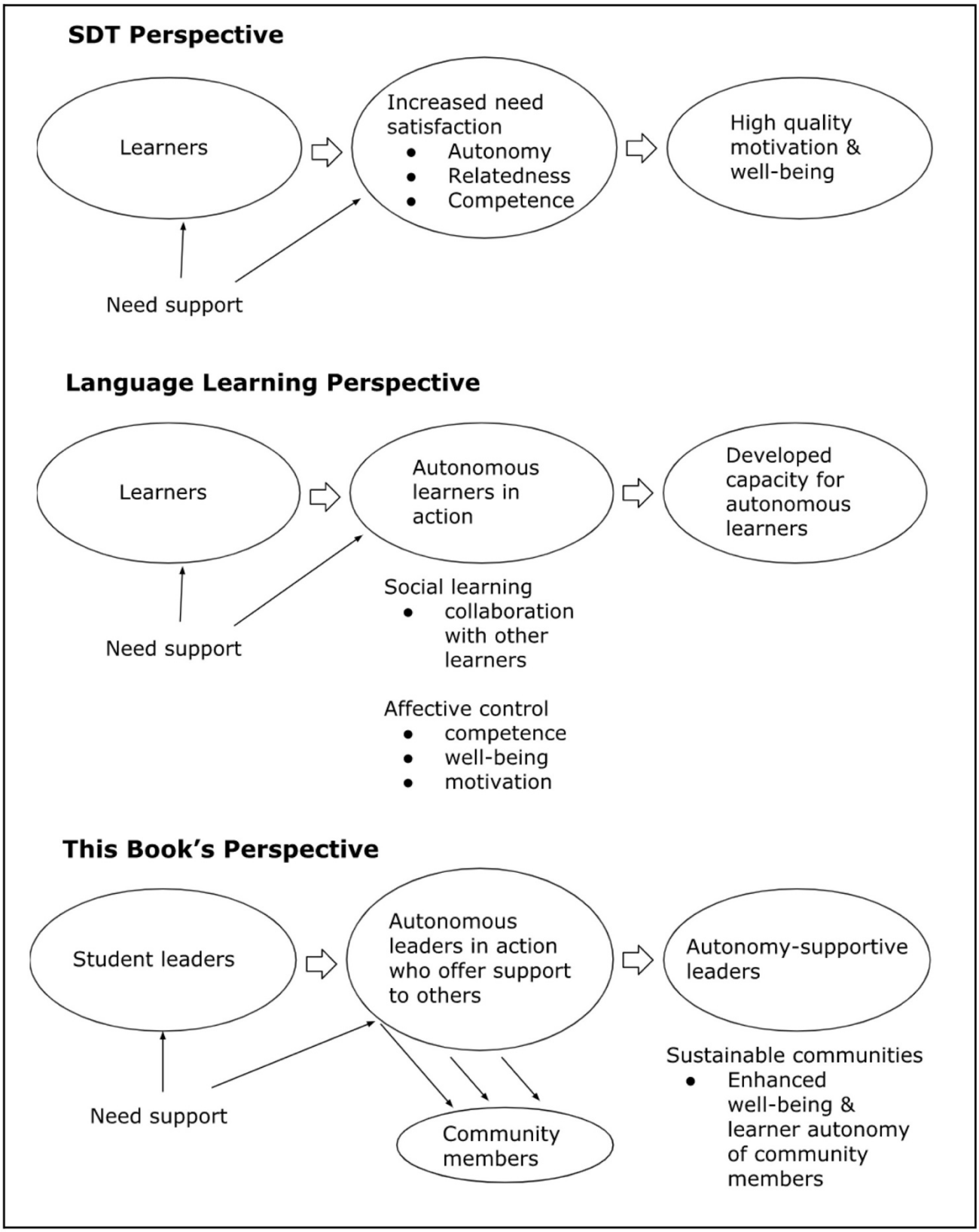
What do we mean by autonomy-supportive leadership?

As a featured part of our book title, the fact that autonomy-supportiveness is a key concept throughout this book is not likely to surprise anyone. However, defining "autonomy-supportive" is deceptively tricky. This is because the term "autonomy" is understood differently in the field of language education and Self-Determination Theory (SDT)/Basic Psychological Needs (BPNs) (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which features as one of the principles introduced in this book. Although BPNs are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, we offer a brief explanation of the SDT model of autonomy here by focusing on differences in the two fields and what "autonomy-supportive" indicates in this book.

Autonomy from an SDT perspective is a motivational state and one of the three psychological needs. The need for autonomy refers to the need for feeling self-endorsement for our actions and thoughts (Reeve, 2016). The other two needs are competence (experiencing mastery and feeling capable of challenges) and relatedness (feeling accepted and connected with others) (Vansteenkiste et al., 2019). SDT points out the importance of supporting these needs in social environments as it nourishes people's intrinsic motivation, engagement, and well-being. The intentional delivery for supporting these needs is called "need-supportive behaviors," and autonomy-supportive behaviors, competence-supportive behaviors, and relatedness-supportive behaviors can be separately defined (Xiao & Toyama, 2020). However, in practice, "autonomy support" appears to be more frequently used than the other two elements (competence and relatedness) as a distinct concept/approach in fields such as teaching or coaching. For instance, autonomy-supportive teaching is an instructional effort that nourishes learners' autonomy by "taking students' perspective; identifying and nurturing students' needs, interests, and preferences; providing optimal challenges; highlighting meaningful learning goals; and presenting interesting, relevant and enriched activities" (Jang et al., 2010, p. 589). By utilizing autonomy-supportive teaching, we can vitalize learners' inner motivation (Reeve, 2016). Additionally, Amorose & Anderson-Butcher (2007) suggested that autonomy-supportive coaches significantly contributed to all three high school and college athletes' perceived basic psychological needs, which increased inner motivation.

Alternatively, autonomy in language learning can be called *"language learner autonomy"* (Lou et al., 2018; Mynard & Shelton-strong, 2022) which we would like to call *"learner autonomy"* as this book's focus is not on language learning. While autonomy in SDT casts as psychological needs and a source of motivation, learner autonomy focuses on a learner's ability to take responsibility for their learning which includes setting goals, selecting resources and strategies, and evaluating learning (Holec, 1981). Therefore, Reeve (2022) describes learner autonomy as "autonomous learner in action" which can be referred to as "agentic engagement" in SDT (p. 34). Since the emergence of social perspectives in language education, learner autonomy is believed to be achieved not only through independence but also a collaboration with others (Dam et al., 1990; Benson & Cooker, 2013). In other words, having a quality relationship with other learners and/or educators, and feeling relatedness is one attribution for learner autonomy. Moreover, a sense of competence and vitalizing motivation is often described as gaining confidence and controlling learners' affective states as a developmental capacity for autonomous language learners (Oxford, 1990; Dörnyei, 2001). Therefore, from language educators' perspectives, the achievement of learner autonomy is built on relatedness and competence support. This view may be similar to Amorose & Anderson-Butcher's (2007) study of SDT which illustrated how all three psychological needs were satisfied through autonomy-supportive coaching. To conclude, our vision of autonomy-supportive leaders is those who create need-supportive communities where members (including leaders themselves) exercise learner autonomy and promote their well-being.

Figure 4: *Autonomy in SDT, language learner autonomy, and autonomy-supportive leadership*



Advising skills introduced in the chapters

Instead of having someone directly teach them about autonomy-supportive leadership, we designed the book for student leaders to learn from their own learning experiences through a reflective learning cycle (see Chapter 6 for more details). Therefore, student leaders can take more responsibility for their learning and become more autonomous learners while becoming autonomy-supportive of others. To support their autonomous learning, we introduce some advising/counseling/coaching skills for you to deepen learner reflection and enhance their learning cycle. We have listed all the advising skills we introduce in each chapter in Figure 5. These skills are adapted from Kelly (1996) and Kato and Mynard (2016). You can also see practical examples of these advising skills being used in discourses with student leaders within the example dialogue sections in each chapter. In Activity 3 of the advising chapter (Chapter 3), we suggest having student leaders identify advising skills that are being used in the dialogue while hiding the "advising skills used and their purposes" part of an example dialogue. You could also try the activity yourself to familiarize yourself with advising skills. These advising skills can be practiced in everyday conversations and class instruction or even in written form when you give feedback on your students' work.

Figure 5: *Advising skills introduced in this book*

Advising Skill	**Purpose**
Attending	Show respect and interest
Empathizing	Show understanding
Supporting	Encourage effort
Questioning	Elicit story and self-explanation
Summarizing	Encapsulate the main elements to create focus
Paraphrasing	Clarify the message
Repeating	Acknowledge and elicit further explanation
Restating	Give recognition
Initiating	Introduce options and new direction
Linking	Connect the idea to a wider value
Interpreting	Help self-understanding
Using metaphor	Conceptualize situations, ideas, and emotions

How to use this book

As we expect readers of this book to be in various professional roles, the number of student leaders who you work with and how much meeting time you have with them will be varied. Thus, we designed this book to be as adoptable and adaptable as possible. Moreover, if your student leaders struggle to understand the academic theories in English, we encourage you to give instructions or guidance bilingually and allow them to self-study the concept in their native language beforehand.

Each chapter contains the following sections: **Rationale**, **Activity**, **Theory Into Practice, Post-Chapter Reflection, and Example Dialogue**. The rationale is for you as a student facilitator to read and understand the literature and ideas behind the activities so that you can explain to your student leaders the purposes and reasons for trying out the activities. This type of explanation signifies respect and transparency, and it is one important autonomy-supportive teaching act (Reeve, 2016). As the purpose of the first chapter, About You, is for you to learn about your learners and build rapport, it will require that you meet with student leaders either one-on-one or in a group to do one of the two activities.

From Chapters 2 to 6, student leaders can try out the learning activities in a group like a workshop or class, or in a self-directed way by the student leaders themselves on their own time. After trying out the activities, student leaders can implement what they have learned in each chapter in their community with the ideas listed in the Theory Into Practice section. After they have attempted implementing ideas from the book, you can ask student leaders reflection questions that are listed in the Post-Chapter Reflection, which can be done one-on-one or in a group. Alternatively, you can use an online platform (e.g., Google Classroom) to share their reflections with you or other leaders (if they are comfortable sharing). Finally, the example dialogue in each chapter is for you to read to further understand the concepts introduced in the chapter and/or how to utilize the activity and advising skills to your student leaders. Therefore, we recommend reading the example dialogue before actually trying out activities with your student leaders.

Additionally, we recommend reading the whole book before working with your student leaders as many chapters and concepts are intertwined. You may also want to change the order of the chapters you use when working with them as well as skip some activities or even an entire chapter. It is up to you how much time you spend on each chapter; you do not need to finish a chapter in a week. If you are planning to implement the activities in this book mainly in a self-directed way, we recommend that you use a learning journal where you and your student leaders can continuously exchange reflective dialogue in written form (you can see an example in Watkins, 2021).

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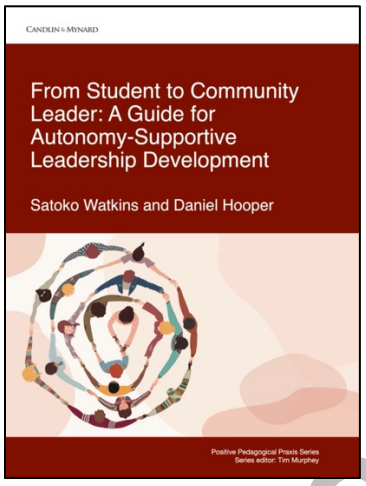

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