

### *Pedagogy of the possible: Imagination, autonomy, and space*

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#### Abstract

This paper explores pedagogical practices which can support the role of imagination in foreign language learning. Over the past decade, work on self and identity in motivation research—most notably Norton's (2001) imagined communities and Dörnyei's (2009) L2 motivational self system—has suggested that teachers might foster students' motivation by helping them imagine themselves as L2 speakers and envisage contexts or communities in which they might use the target language. If teachers are to help students create and sustain visions of L2 identities, they need to employ a pedagogy which incorporates and facilitates the work of the imagination. In order to provide guidelines for pedagogical practice, this paper examines the experiences of Japanese university students studying English as a foreign language in a self-directed learning course. Prior analysis of the data revealed several affordances which supported the participants' metacognitive development and the role of imagination in their learning. Using these affordances as a conceptual framework, this paper builds on previous work by identifying elements in the learning environment which appear to support the role of imagination in the students' language learning. The paper concludes by suggesting guidelines for pedagogical practice and considering the implications for further inquiry.

*Keywords:* imagination, self-directed learning, ecology, affordances, autonomy, space, metacognition

There are not many references to imagination in the second language acquisition literature. This could be because imagination has a bad reputation. Egan (2007), who traced the history of imagination in western culture from ancient Greece to the present day, notes that philosophers, such as Plato and Descartes, have characterized imagination as being not simply inferior to "reason" but as an actual threat to our ability to reason. Johnson (1987) contends that present-day researchers deny imagination a central role in rationality because of a philosophical and cultural tradition which has inculcated the notion there is "one correct 'God's-Eye-View' about what the world really is like" (p. x), and the researcher's task is to describe this reality. This "objectivist orientation" is based on the premise that "there is a rational structure to reality, independent of the beliefs of any particular people, and correct reason mirrors this rational structure" (p. x). Such a perspective leaves little space for an exploration of imagination.

However, the academic landscape has been changing and imagination is finding a place in both pedagogy and research. What Johnson (1987) refers to as the *objectivist orientation* has been contested by poststructuralist and post-modern thinkers. Moreover, advances in cognitive psychology and neuroscience have led theorists to hypothesize about the role of imagination. Johnson (1987), who has explored the part imagination might play in a theory of meaning and rationality, contends, "without imagination, nothing in the world could be meaningful. Without imagination, we could never make sense of our experience. Without imagination, we could never reason toward knowledge of reality" (p. ix). More recently, Damasio (2010), concluding his examination of the emergence of self from a neuroscience perspective, writes that "the ultimate gift of consciousness to humanity" is imagination, which enables us "to navigate the future" and "to invent the ways and means of achieving and magnifying" (pp. 296-297) our well-being. Preparing people to navigate the future and ensure their well-being are the ultimate aims of education systems worldwide. To this end, Liu and Noppe-Brandon (2009) promote imagination as an essential cognitive skill that can and should be taught. The importance now attributed to imagination in relation to cognitive and personal development has led Egan (2005) to conclude that engaging students' imaginations is essential to successful learning and teaching. However, he notes that making this "a routine part of the classroom experience has proven quite elusive" (p. xii).

Taking up this challenge, the aim of this paper is to identify pedagogical guidelines which can inform the work of teachers who would like to make engaging students' imaginations a part of the routine in foreign language classrooms. It does this by reporting on a study exploring the English language learning experiences of Japanese university students enrolled in a self-directed learning course. Prior analysis of the data revealed several affordances which

supported the participants' metacognitive development (Cotterall & Murray, 2009) and pointed to the role of imagination in their learning (Murray, 2011a, 2011b). Whereas this earlier analysis focused on the experiences of the learners, in this paper, the data are reexamined from a pedagogical perspective. Using the affordances identified in Cotterall and Murray (2009) as a conceptual framework, I build on previous work by identifying elements in the learning environment which appear to support the role of imagination in the students' language learning. The paper concludes by suggesting guidelines for pedagogical practice and considering the implications for further inquiry.

### Imagination and Pedagogy

Work by Norton (2001) and Dörnyei (2009) in the area of language learning motivation has led to a focus on imagination in the field of applied linguistics (see Murphey, Falout, Fukada, & Fukuda, 2012; Murray, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Ryan, 2006; Ryan & Irie, 2014; Yashima, 2013). Norton (2001) introduced Anderson's (1991) construct of *imagined communities* to language learning. *Imagined communities* are "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241). Although we do not have immediate, physical, or actual access to these communities, we nonetheless experience a sense of belonging through our imagination. Norton has used this notion to explore how learners' sense of belonging to target language communities, which are not immediately accessible, can impact their identity construction and language learning.

In another line of inquiry, Dörnyei (2009) has proposed the *L2 motivational self system*. Informed by work in the field of psychology—Markus and Nurius's (1986) possible selves and most notably Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy theory—Dörnyei's model has three components: the ideal self, the self learners would like to become; the ought-to-self, the self they feel they ought to become, or perhaps more to the point, the self that others feel they should become; and their language learning experience. The underlying premise is that having a vision of our ideal self as a foreign language speaker can be a powerful force motivating us to learn the language. Both Norton's imagined communities and Dörnyei's L2 self system raise the issue of the role of imagination in language learning. Furthermore, they present an interesting pedagogical challenge to teachers. How can teachers support the development of learners' visions of ideal selves and the communities in which these selves might participate? Dörnyei (2009) points out that having a vision of an L2 self is a process comprised of four steps: constructing the vision, strength-

ening the vision, substantiating the vision, and activating the L2 self. To support this process, classroom practice will have to be guided by a pedagogy which facilitates the functioning of the imagination.

In order to elaborate this pedagogy, educators need to have an understanding of what imagination is; however, concrete and cogent definitions of imagination are not easy to come by. Egan (2007), whose work has focused on stimulating children's imaginations through classroom practice, writes that we must not view "imagination as a thing, as a particular, distinct part of the mind" but rather as "a particular kind of flexibility, energy, and vividness that can imbue all mental functions, as a kind of mood of mind" (p. 19). In an earlier work, borrowing from White (1990), he characterizes imagination as "the capacity to think of things as possibly being so" (Egan, 1992, p. 43), and contends, "it is by imagination . . . that we make ourselves, seeing the directions in which we might move and the possible selves we might inhabit" (p. 33). Similarly, Wenger (1998), who has explored imagination as a mode of belonging to communities of practice through which we develop our various identities, associates imagination with "a process of expanding our self by transcending time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (p. 176). In the same vein, Liu and Noppe-Brandon (2009) describe it as "the ability to conjure new realities and possibilities: in John Dewey's words, 'to look at things as if they could be otherwise'" (p. 19). A common thread runs through these attempts to define imagination: possibility. Imagination opens up a world of possibilities. In language learning, it is through the imagination that learners can come to see the possibility of one day being able to speak a foreign language and entertain the possibility of participating in target language communities.

Most learners will probably not have imagined a future self capable of conversing in a foreign language. For language teachers the challenge is to create learning environments and to devise tasks which will engage learners' imaginations and enable them to develop and sustain such visions. To achieve this, teachers might consider an approach such as Davis and Sumara's (2007) pedagogy of the *not-yet-imaginable*, which focuses on "that space of possibilities that is opened up through the exploration of the current space of the possible" (p. 58). The *not-yet-imaginable* "is not a realm of unthinkable thoughts but, rather, thoughts that cannot yet be triggered" (p. 58). The role of the teacher is to create the conditions for the emergence of the *not-yet-imaginable* by orienting the attentions of learners and helping them to explore what is currently possible within and beyond the classroom. Davis and Sumara are using space in a metaphorical sense. However, educators will need to consider how this metaphorical space might map onto the physical space in which they find themselves with their students, and how this physical space can con-

tribute to—or, perhaps even hinder—finding tangible ways of accessing and manoeuvring within the metaphorical space. Teachers are going to need concrete guidance and specific suggestions as to how they might open up this space of possibilities. This paper addresses this concern by suggesting features which would characterize a pedagogy aimed at encouraging students to engage their imagination in the exploration of the possible.

### The Study

In order to identify elements of a pedagogy fostering the imagination, I reexamine the qualitative data from a mixed-methods study which investigated the learning experiences of 269 Japanese first-year university students enrolled in a self-directed learning (SDL) course. The course was offered as part of an English for Academic Purposes programme and delivered in a self-access centre. It had two main objectives: to help students improve their English language proficiency and develop their metacognitive knowledge (Flavell, 1976) and skills (Wenden, 1998). In addition to language learning activities, the course aimed to provide students with opportunities to expand their knowledge about themselves as language learners and to acquire skills enabling them to “manage, direct, regulate, [and] guide their learning” (Wenden, 1998, p. 519).

To this end, in accordance with Holec’s (1981) model of learner autonomy, students created their own learning plans. They determined their goals, chose appropriate materials, decided how they were going to use these materials, monitored their progress, and assessed the outcomes. Students learned the language through direct access to target language materials. Rather than deliver language lessons, the teachers provided instruction in learning strategies and advised learners. The students documented their learning by making learning logs entries. Their learning plans, log entries, and other evidence of learning were kept in portfolios, which played a key role in the management and assessment of learning. Grades were determined through a process of collaborative evaluation (Dickinson, 1987). (For a detailed description of the course, see Murray, 2009, 2011a, 2011b).

In order to investigate the extent to which the course was successful in meeting its objectives, a mixed-methods study was carried out over a three-year period. The methodology incorporated survey research into an ethnographic design with data coming from six sources: a language beliefs questionnaire in Likert-scale format administered in pre-/post-test style, a language learning history, a course evaluation questionnaire, learners’ portfolios, interviews, and focus group discussions. A limitation of the study was that it was not specifically designed to explore the role of imagination in the learning process. A further

limitation is that gains in language proficiency cannot be solely attributed to work in the course; therefore, the focus is on the learners' perceptions of how the course had helped them improve their English language skills. The data are, however, able to provide insights into the learners' metacognitive development.

An initial report on the study (Cotterall & Murray, 2009) provided an analysis of the quantitative data, which indicated that the SDL course was successful in supporting the students' metacognitive development. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data at that time revealed several affordances (Gibson, 1986), which facilitated the students' metacognitive growth. Subsequent analysis of qualitative data (Murray, 2011a, 2011b) indicated that these affordances also supported the functioning of the imagination and pointed to the role imagination played in the learning process from goal setting to assessment. Employing these affordances as a conceptual guide, the current paper reexamines this qualitative data in order to identify elements in the learning environment which might suggest pedagogical guidelines for teachers wishing to engage students' imaginations in the learning process.

### Affordances and Imagination

It could be argued that affordances are as much a product of the imagination as they are the environment. Gibson (1986) characterized affordances as opportunities for action as they are perceived by individuals in the environment. Johnson (1987) would contend that it is imagination which enables us to "see" these opportunities. However, as Menezes (2011) cautions, we must be mindful that affordances are not properties of the environment, but rather they emerge through learners' interaction with the environment. More specifically, "an *affordance* refers to the fit between an animal's capabilities and the environmental supports and opportunities (both good and bad) that make possible a given activity" (Gibson & Pick, 2000, as cited in van Lier, 2007, p. 54). Johnson (1987) notes that "our experience and understanding partake of the reality of both our bodily organism and our environment, broadly conceived to include our history, culture, language, institutions, theories, and so forth" (p. 207). In other words, learners' tendency to perceive opportunities for action are dependent on the identities they bring to the environment; or what Barab and Roth (2006) refer to as "effectivity sets," which determine that an individual is "more likely to perceive and interact with the world in certain ways" (p. 6). In Cotterall and Murray (2009) we identified five affordances potentially available in the learning environment offered by the SDL course. We labelled these affordances personalization, engagement, experimentation, reflection, and support; and illustrated how they contributed to the participants' metacognitive devel-

opment. To these affordances I would add a sixth, autonomy, and argue that all six facilitated the role of imagination in the participants' language learning.

## Engagement

Because the affordances all work together to form what Barab and Roth (2006) refer to as a network of affordances, it is difficult to isolate them, arrange them linearly, and single one out as a place to begin. However, engagement lies at the heart of our understanding of the construct. Van Lier (2002) writes that "when we are active in a setting, affordances are created by our activity and the surrounding world" (p. 150). In the SDL course, the students played an active role in all aspects of their learning from goal setting to assessment. They designed and carried out their own learning experiences. When learners are engaged through action and emotions, the context is conducive to the functioning of the imagination (Egan, 2005; Liu & Noppe-Brandon, 2009).

Wenger (1998, p. 185) characterized "the work of imagination" as entailing engagement in a number of processes. These include the following:

- recognizing our experience in others, being able to put ourselves in someone else's position (as we will see later, this was a key feature of students' work with DVDs of movies and television programmes);
- defining a trajectory that connects what we are doing now to who we would like to be in the future (a crucial process in the development of an L2 self);
- locating what we are doing now in broader systems in time and space; in other words, seeing the bigger picture (as the students did when they set immediate short-term learning goals and made the connection between their daily learning activities and their future self);
- sharing stories, explanations, and descriptions; creating models (or, in the case of the students in the SDL class, creating learning plans and discussing their learning with classmates);
- documenting historical developments, events and transitions (as the students did when they wrote their language learning histories and made learning log entries);
- generating scenarios, exploring other ways of doing what we are doing, other possible worlds, and other identities.

Imagination encompasses engagement in a variety of practices; and as the data from the study illustrate, these practices characterized the students' participation in the SDL class (Murray, 2011a, 2011b). In summary, Wenger (1998) says that imagination "requires the ability [which I interpret to also mean the *possibility*] to explore, take risks, and create unlikely connections" (p. 185).

## Exploration

In the SDL course, students were able to explore and experiment with different goals, materials, and learning strategies. In other words, they had the opportunity to try new things, as well as work with familiar things in new ways. For example, a number of the participants revealed that although they enjoyed watching English language movies in high school they did not realize this activity could be a valid means of improving their language skills. In the course, they were introduced to strategies for working with DVDs of movies and television programmes. Addressing this point on the course evaluation questionnaire in response to a question pertaining to changes in perception of how to best learn a language, one student wrote, "*I didn't think the movie [DVDs] are enough to learn English because they are fun, so my image of study English was hard.*" Here, we have a glimpse of the role imagination can play in the learning process. The learner imagined learning English to be "hard," thus preventing him or her from seeing that using something fun could be helpful. This also illustrates Wenger's (1998) point that when it comes to exploring and taking risks, imagination "demands some degree of playfulness" (p. 185).

## Personalization

Exploration, risk-taking, and indulging in some fun were key elements of the process of personalizing the learning. In Cotterall and Murray (2009) we characterized personalization as an affordance which encompassed the dual process of enabling students to explore their identities as learners while at the same time enabling them to adapt the learning to suit their identities. On the course evaluation questionnaire, a student wrote, "*I liked this course because there are discoveries of myself, the style of learning as a language learner.*" This was made possible by features of the learning structure which enabled learners to set goals, that is, decide what they wanted to learn; select materials which interested them; and employ strategies and activities which corresponded with their learning styles.

In Murray (2011a) I illustrated this process by recounting the experiences of a student named Hiro. Hiro had a vision of his future self as an "*international person . . . work[ing] in a foreign country using English.*" This image suggested goals for his language learning; he decided he would need to work on his ability to participate in everyday conversations, acquire knowledge about the world, expand his outlook, and develop a worldview. Once he had clearly identified goals, he then chose his materials: DVDs of movies and television programmes with lots of everyday conversations and a news magazine especially designed



for Japanese EFL learners. Assessing the outcome, Hiro said, "*I can gain a broad vision and I could gain a lot of information in the world.*" By helping him develop a worldview and providing information enabling him to visualize the communities he might participate in one day, his choice of content played a central role in the construction of his identity as an international person.

Underlying this process of identity construction was the functioning of the imagination. Hiro's imagination played an essential role in his planning by helping him determine his goals and subsequently choose materials to meet those goals. In other words, his imagination helped him see the path he had to take in order to make his possible self a reality. Wenger (1998) supports this view, explaining that imagination helps us in "defining a trajectory that connects what we are doing to an extended identity, seeing ourselves in new ways" (p. 185). Projecting into the future and seeing themselves participating in imagined English language communities provided the students in the course with a model of their English-speaking future self that they could aspire to. However, it is important to note that imagination was not operating in isolation. Hiro and the other learners were working in an environment which supported the expansion of their metacognitive knowledge and skills through daily practice. This would suggest that in order to create a learning environment that facilitates the functioning of the imagination teachers should incorporate activities designed to enhance metacognitive development.

In the same paper (Murray, 2011a), I discussed the learning experiences of another student, Mari. Mari's experiences are important to mention here because they provide further insight into the role pop culture can play in helping learners personalize their learning and develop an L2 self. In order to meet her goal of being able to participate in everyday conversations, Mari chose to work with a DVD of her favourite American movie. Her comments suggest this DVD presented an imagined community that she could engage with through the power of the imagination. Writing about the power of media to draw us into the worlds they create, Wenger (1998) says, "stories can transport our experience into the situations they relate and involve us in producing the meanings of those events as though we were participants" (p. 203).

Comments Mari made in an interview indicate she was engaging in a meaning-making process similar to the one Wenger discusses. When asked if she thought her work in the course helped her meet her goal of participating in everyday conversations, she replied, "*I think so because DVDs have daily conversation with daily phrases and if you listen carefully to the conversations maybe you can see it in yourself.*" Her phrase *maybe you can see it in yourself* suggests that Mari is relating these expressions to who she is as a person—taking the words from "other people's mouths" and making them her own

(Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). According to Bakhtin, assimilating others' discourse shapes our identity and how we view and interact with the world. Word by word, Mari appears to be constructing her target language identity.

In addition to providing insight into the role pop culture can play in the development of an L2 identity, Mari's experience illustrates how it can feed the imagination. Movies and television programmes can provide learners with models of target language speakers using words which can be appropriated. An important feature of this medium is that the words are available in a context. As Bakhtin (1981) stresses, "the entire speaking situation is important: who is present during it [the discourse], with what expression or mimicry is it uttered, with what shades of intonation" (p. 341). Similarly, Lemke (2002) reminds us, "you cannot, neither materially nor psychologically nor culturally, make meaning only with the formal linguistic sign system; other modes of meaning-making are always functionally coupled with language use in real activity" (p. 72). DVDs of movies and television programmes, through the power of the imagination, have the potential to immerse learners in countless contexts, enabling them to make meaning, to judge if the words are suitable for them, and to determine in which situations they might be able to put these words to use.

## Reflection

Another affordance available in the learning environment was the opportunity for reflection. From the very first day of the course, students were encouraged to reflect on who they were as language learners by completing a language beliefs questionnaire and a learner profile. The profile required them to answer questions about what they had done to learn English in the past and to think about things they would like to be able to do in the target language in the future. During the first two weeks of the course, they wrote a language learning history, which they were encouraged to conclude by commenting on how they saw themselves using the target language in the future and what they intended to do at this point to improve their language skills. Students were also required to monitor their learning on a daily basis. When they engaged in coursework both in and out of class, they made a learning log entry, in which they noted what they had done, a reflection on the experience, and what they planned to do when they resumed their language learning. As a final course activity, the students had to assess their overall learning by participating in the portfolio evaluation process. After reviewing their portfolio with the aid of a performance rubric, they completed an evaluation report in which they assigned themselves a grade and explained why it was appropriate in terms of the criteria. In retrospect, these and other classroom activities en-

couraged the students to not only think about their language learning but to focus on how they saw themselves as a language learner, in other words, to envisage their identity as a language learner.

Reflection, critical thinking, and, more specifically, the metacognitive capacity to reflect on one's learning are closely associated with imagination. In their list of "capacities for imaginative learning," Liu and Noppe-Brandon (2009) note the importance of reflecting and assessing, which they qualify as "looking back on your learning to identify what challenges remain and to begin learning anew" (p. 38). On the SDL course evaluation questionnaire, students indicated that they appreciated the opportunities for reflection and recognized their importance. Answering the question, "what did you like about the course?" students made comments similar to the following:

- *"Students have a chance to see themselves and find their weakness in learning English and they can improve and develop these things."*
- *"I think this course gave us the opportunity to look at ourselves objectively and think deeply how we can improve our English skills."*

These comments indicate that students were engaging in the process Wenger (1998) refers to when he writes that "imagination requires the ability to disengage – to move back and look at our engagement through the eyes of an outsider" (p. 185). When we ask students to reflect, to monitor or assess their learning, we are asking them to stand back and look at their engagement in language learning practices. Opportunities to reflect on learning provide an opening for imagination to do its work.

In order to support the role of imagination in language learning, educators will need to rethink current assessment practices (Egan, 1992, 2005, 2007; Stout, 2007). Wenger (1998) says, "[imagination] requires the ability to proceed without being too quick with the constraints of a specific form of accountability" (p. 185). This quotation speaks to our current assessment practices which rely heavily on testing. Van Lier (2007) notes that when "identical test packets are slapped onto each individual learner's desk, the learner's right to be different and the teacher's ability to honour differences die a sudden death" (p. 47). So does imagination. A clear message is sent to learners that what matters is *what is* and not *what if* (Liu & Noppe-Brandon, 2009). To support the work of the imagination, we need alternative assessment practices, such as the collaborative portfolio evaluation process used in the SDL course. Promoting the imagination in learning means employing assessment activities that are open to possibility—that have the potential to acknowledge and value learning outcomes educators have not necessarily anticipated.

## Support

Another affordance that served to bolster both the students' metacognitive development and their use of imagination was the support they received. Two main sources of support were teachers and fellow classmates. On the course evaluation questionnaire, comments in response to the question concerning what the students liked about the course—such as, "*I could get advice on my strategy or materials from my teacher and classmates*"—showed students acknowledged and appreciated the support they received. Periodic small group discussions, organized as a class activity, provided students with opportunities to talk about aspects of their learning and to exchange ideas concerning materials, assessment strategies, and the like. Whether or not these formal discussions had an influence on out-of-class behaviour is difficult to say, but, as a teacher, one of the things I observed was that students had a tendency to come to class early, and during that time talked about their learning and recommended materials to each other.

As for the support provided by the teachers, one student wrote on the course evaluation questionnaire, "*the teacher gave us advice, but we did not necessarily have to follow it—so that was good.*" This comment resonates because the important thing about advice is that there should be no obligation to follow it. In a pedagogy designed to foster the emergence of the *not-yet-imaginable*, Davis and Sumara (2007) state that the role of the teacher is "to orient the attentions of learners and, in the process, to assist in the exploration of the space of the existing possible" (p. 64). Effective advice should direct students' attention to materials, strategies, activities, and goals, and also to imagination and possible future selves (cf. Dörnyei, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

In the SDL course, narrative played a key role in directing learners' attention to their identities as language learners and their future selves through the language learning history activity. In fact, the data suggest that narrative fulfilled a number of support functions, such as facilitating the use of the imagination, helping learners relate to the emotional aspects of learning, encouraging them to explore their language learner identity, and aiding in the planning process. These points are illustrated by the experiences of one participant, Nobu, whose language learning history recounted his transformation from a schoolboy, who hated studying English, into a young man in love (for an analysis of Nobu's experiences, see Murray 2011b). Fleeing from what he found to be an oppressive learning context designed to prepare students for university entrance examinations, Nobu had a chance encounter with an international exchange student. This moment marked the beginning of the emergence of Nobu's L2 self. In order to communicate with this young woman and realize his sudden vision of an ideal

self as her special friend, he needed English. Nobu continued his language learning history by outlining what he did to learn the language from that point forward. In the SDL course, he built upon these strategies and activities. As Egan (1992) notes, "if we wish to engage students' imaginations we need to attend to engaging their emotions, and to engage their emotions we need to attend to story or narrative structuring" (p. 72).

Emotions are an integral aspect of both imagination (Egan, 2005, 2007; Harris, 2000) and cognition (Damasio, 2003, 2010). Therefore, it stands to reason that students will need emotional support. In a language classroom context students need to feel that they can trust their teacher and that the classroom is a safe place where they can take risks (Canagarajah, 2004). For the most part, the first-year students who participated in this study came from learning environments in which the teacher was in charge. Having to take on so much responsibility for their learning was, to say the least, a novel experience. In the SDL course, scaffolding provided by the materials enabled the students to proceed step-by-step, breaking down what might have first appeared to be an impossible challenge into do-able tasks. Progressing in this way is especially important when it comes to working with the imagination. Liu and Noppe-Brandon (2009) advise educators to "chunk it: Show how small it all starts" (p. 108). They explain that because "open-endedness can be paralyzing" and "because we are socialized early to embrace *what is* rather than *what if* . . . it can help to break the process of imagining into chunks, to reveal each chunk as quite accessible, and thereby to demystify imagination" (p. 109).

Another crucial form of support that teachers can offer learners is to provide them with time in class to work on their learning plans. Bakhtin's (1981) work suggests that we cannot expect to open up the space of the *not-yet-imaginable* without taking time into account. He used the term *chronotope*, which literally means 'time space' (p. 84), to explore the interconnectedness of the temporal and the spatial in language and literature. He borrowed the concept from relativity theory, which emphasizes the notion that time and space should be considered together and in relation to each other. Discussing Bakhtin's construct in regard to language learning, Lemke (2005) defines chronotopes as "typical movements from place to place with their associated times of passage and paces of events" (p. 117). He goes on to say,

chronotopes represent a kind of routinization of life on longer timescales than individual events or activities. They provide a measure of predictability and a sense of expectation about how long we should spend somewhere, how fast events should take in this setting vs. that one, what should come next. (p. 118)

Chronotopes are germane to our discussion of pedagogy because they capture

what educators have been doing in terms of classroom management and lesson planning. In institutional settings, learning is guided by the chronotope of “the well-managed classroom.” The pace and sequence of lessons bring together time and space. When interest starts to wane and energy flags, it is time to move on to the next activity. In the space of the language classroom, time can be regimented, a tool for managing learning activities and ultimately controlling them. In the study described in this paper, the learning was organized according to a different chronotope. Within the physical space of the self-access centre and the metaphorical space of the lesson, time was for the students to use as they pleased, albeit within the confines of the social context. What is important for us concerning the chronotope is “the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). If we wish to create a space which supports the functioning of the imagination, we need to give our students the gift of time.

## Autonomy

Of course, “giving students time” is a metaphor. We cannot give our students time, anymore that we can give them autonomy. Time is a resource which can be made available to learners along with other resources. Van Lier (2007), promoting an action-based curriculum informed by autonomy—defined as “being the agent of one’s own actions” (p. 48)—writes that the starting point has to be the “activities, needs and emergent purposes of the learner” who must be “an active, perceiving agent” (p. 53). Describing how the curriculum would be organized, he explains, “on the basis of activities and emergent needs, the teacher makes resources available in the environment, and guides the learner’s perception and action towards arrays of affordances that can further his or her goals” (p. 53). In this sentence van Lier captures the essence of the pedagogy underlying the SDL course. As the students exercised their agency by making use of the resources and taking advantage of the affordances, autonomy emerged.

An emergent phenomenon, conceptualized as the possibility to exercise one’s agency, autonomy itself became an affordance. As an affordance, it facilitated acting on other possibilities within the learning environment. The possibility of exercising one’s agency by making choices concerning goals, materials, activities, and strategies enabled learners to personalize the learning. The students also exercised their agency through the extent to which they chose to engage in the learning process, explore its various aspects, and take advantage of the support features. The choices and decisions the learners made reflected their identities and were oriented toward the person they wanted to become.

Invoking a space metaphor, van Lier (2007) contends “there must also

be enough room to innovate and move in novel directions for learners to develop autonomy and fuel their intrinsic motivation" (p. 53). He suggests that imagination, as manifested by innovation and the new, is necessary for autonomy to flourish. However, I contend that the converse is also true: Autonomy is necessary for the imagination to flourish. Wenger (1998) supports this point when he says, "imagination needs an opening. It needs the willingness, freedom, energy, and time to expose ourselves to the exotic, move around, try new identities, and explore new relations" (p. 185). Also employing a space metaphor, Wenger points to imagination's reliance on agency, autonomy, and time. He says imagination needs time to move around, making the connection between time and space, reminiscent of Bakhtin's construct of the chronotope. Overall, Wenger's comment is suggestive of the connections that exist between imagination, identity, autonomy, time, and space. In our language classrooms, if we are to open up that space of possibilities which will enable learners to develop second language identities over time, we need to work with imagination and autonomy.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore what might constitute a pedagogy in support of the imagination in the foreign language classroom. Framed in Davis and Sumara's (2007) terms, how might language educators open up that space of the *not-yet-imaginable* and help learners imagine a future self as a foreign language speaker? Data from the study exploring the experiences of learners in a self-directed learning course suggest that affordances available in the learning environment enabled the participants to develop their metacognition (Cotterall & Murray, 2009) and employ their imagination. (Murray, 2011a, 2011b). Examining these affordances, this paper identified pedagogical elements which could be incorporated into a foreign language curriculum designed to foster the imagination.

Table 1 draws these elements together and presents them as a collection of pedagogical guidelines to inform the work of educators hoping to engage students' imagination. An underlying principle of the pedagogy is to create an action-based learning environment (van Lier, 2007) that holds the potential for affordances to emerge. For clarity of presentation, the affordances that provided the conceptual framework for this paper are used as a means of organizing the guidelines. It should be noted that the affordances and guidelines work together as a network with no particular hierarchy or linear order. Furthermore, guidelines may support more than one affordance. For example, the guideline "make use of narrative" has been associated with *reflection*. However, when the

students were writing their language learning histories, they were not only reflecting on past experiences, they were also personalizing their learning and engaging in an exploration of self. Therefore, given the multiple functions of the guidelines, their placement is somewhat arbitrary. Working together as a dynamic system, these guidelines can provide the constituent elements of a pedagogy with the potential to engage students' imaginations and open up the space of the *not-yet-imaginable* (Davis & Sumara, 2007).

Table 1 Pedagogy of the possible: Guidelines for practice

Affordances	Guidelines
Engagement	Think of imagination as a tool—something to work with. Discuss imagination with students and the role it plays in our everyday lives and learning. Facilitate learners' active participation in all aspects of their learning from goal setting to assessment.
Exploration	Encourage learners to experiment: Ask, " <i>what if?</i> " Focus on what is <i>possible</i> as opposed to <i>what (already) is</i> . Expose learners to new people, places, things, and ideas. Facilitate small group discussions in which learners share ideas and talk about their learning. Promote playfulness; make fun permissible.
Personalization	Make learners' current needs and hopes for the future the starting point for learning. Allow learners to set their own goals. Enable learners to select materials they find interesting. Introduce learners to a variety of learning strategies and activities so they can use those that suit their sense of self.
Reflection	Incorporate multiple and varied opportunities for reflection. Encourage learners to monitor and assess their learning. Make use of narrative.
Support	Feed the imagination through pop culture and media. Direct learners' attention. Advise learners. Help learners find the support they need, and encourage them to support each other. Create an emotionally safe environment for risk-taking. Make the possible do-able by "chunking" it. Provide scaffolding. Make time in class for students to explore, experiment, engage in learning activities they value, and reflect.
Autonomy	Enable learners to exercise their agency by making choices. Let learners plan and manage their learning (e.g., organize their activities, keep records, etc.). Make it possible for learners to proceed at their own pace. Employ open-ended assessment practices.



Metaphors of space and place appear often in discussions on imagination. Future inquiries and experimentation with instructional innovation designed to foster the imagination should not overlook this “coincidence.” In other words, they should take into account space and place, and the role they play in the processes of imagination, metacognition, and actual learning, which unfold across varying time scales (Lemke, 2002). This study suggests that may mean adopting an ecological perspective in both curriculum design and subsequent inquiry. Ecological perspectives, which view the learner as a component of the environment, facilitate the study of a learning space with a focus on its emergent properties and affordances. Definitions of imagination that characterize it as “a particular kind of flexibility, energy and vividness” (Egan, 2007, p. 19) suggest imagination might itself be an emergent phenomenon, a product of the interaction, or self-organization, of elements in the environment, including the learner’s cognitive systems. This would be in line with findings from this study, which point to several affordances working together to support the imagination and to create a learning environment conducive to the development of L2 identities. These affordances formed a pedagogy of the possible, enabling learners to conceive of doing things differently and to take steps toward the realization of their visions of a future self using the target language to fulfil their dreams.

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