



Upcoming Meetings

At the [Zaza City, 5th Floor - Palette](#)

Sunday, April 26th, 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm

Can Adolescents Become Autonomous Learners?

By Dr. Marshall R. Childs

Overview

The best advice we can get from experts on language teaching is that we should try to make our learners into autonomous (self-driven, independent) learners. In this mode, they are to choose their own avenues of learning, measure their progress against their goals, and motivate themselves to persevere.

To what extent is it realistic to expect adolescents to take control of their own learning? Evidence of two types suggests that adolescents may be reluctant or even unable to take this responsibility. First, circumstantial evidence of the conventional organization of secondary schools shows that students are typically guided and herded rather than given their heads. Second, neurological evidence of the developmental pattern of the pre-frontal cortex (the part of the brain that sets goals, looks to the consequences of actions, and guides behavior toward goals) suggests that adolescents have limited ability to govern their own behavior.

Shall we, then, hoot the experts off the stage when they try to recommend autonomy for adolescents? Not completely, perhaps. The experts would benefit from a degree of humbling, but we need to examine realistic circumstances under which autonomous motivation can be encouraged in adolescents. To do so will require some re-thinking of how we can teach them, and how we can best position them to take advantage of whatever autonomy they can muster.

If you have questions, please check our [JALT website \(www.hamajalt.org\)](http://www.hamajalt.org), or contact Dan Frost at 053-460-7956 or you can also contact Dan at his e-mail: danshonest@yahoo.com. See you in April!