Encouraging Learners to Become Better-informed Consumers of L2 Learning Opportunities

Cynthia White*, Jennifer Bown

Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, USA

Special Issue: Pathways to the Successful Teaching and Learning of an L2

In Honor of Andrew Cohen's Contributions to L2 Teaching and Learning Research

Abstract

The notion of language learners as informed consumers developed by Cohen and White (2008) takes up the issue of how best to develop the knowledge, skills and awareness of language learners given the infinite variety of language learning opportunities. The informed consumer approach focused not only on developing awareness of both formal and informal learning environments, but also on enhancing the ability to critically appraise those opportunities and to optimise language learning within them. In this article we trace how the notion of language learners as informed consumers has been drawn on in innovative studies of technology-mediated language learning; a common focus of those studies has been on ways of fostering awareness of the potential of particular technology-mediated learning environments and the relevant knowledge and skills which would support the active and effective use of those environments. We show how strands of the informed consumer approach have been used to investigate expertise and affordances in electronic dictionary use (Levy & Steel, 2015) and the trajectories of distance learners of Chinese (Tasker, 2010). In the latter part of the article we consider the experiences and reflections of learners of Arabic in a study abroad context in Jordan

C.J.White@massey.ac.nz

as part of Project Perseverance; findings from that project open up new dimensions of what it means to be an informed consumer of language instruction in relation to specific situational and cultural norms and constraints. To conclude the article identifies not only the distinctive contribution of the informed consumer approach but also how it sheds light on the ways in which individuals seek out and curate personally meaningful sites for language learning within their life worlds.

Keywords: language consumer awareness; informed choice; technology-mediated language learning; study abroad

Introduction

How can we get people to be more successful in language learning? This question represents a perennial challenge for language teachers, teacher trainers and researchers who aim to optimise the processes of L2 learning. Multiple, diverse avenues of enquiry have been developed to address that question from a concern with language teaching methodology, curricula, task design and teacher professional development, to a focus on learner contributions such as motivation and learner beliefs. In addition, a rich seam of research has been developed over the past four decades into language learning styles and strategies (see for example Chamot & Harris, 2019; Cohen, 2010) and in such related fields as independent language learning and learner autonomy. The notion of the language learner as informed consumer takes another stance in getting people to be more successful as L2 learners: it addresses the reality that language learning is an infinitely diverse and complex endeavour and that it is not easy for individuals to make decisions and choices about how best to invest their time, energy and resources in pursuing their language learning goals.

Central to this innovative approach to language learner development is an acknowledgement that making choices places demands on individuals in terms of the knowledge and skills required to interpret information, to make choices and then to act on those decisions. Importantly, such knowledge and understanding of language learning and the ability to apply that to real-life contexts cannot be assumed. A further aspect of the approach is the multi-dimensional nature of what is required in decision-making: individuals move from more macro-level decisions such as choice of target language and learning environments, and then within those environments learners can become increasingly skilled in critically appraising their options, in orchestrating resources and in continuing to optimise those learning opportunities moment by moment.

In this chapter, we give analytical attention to the development of the work on learners as informed consumers of language learning opportunities beginning with Cohen and White (2008) then tracing where and how it has been taken up in different studies. In the latter part of the article, we take a data-driven approach to see how reflections of learners of Arabic on study abroad in Jordan might both illustrate and open up new areas for consideration as we seek to enhance possibilities for language learners as informed consumers.

Towards a Language Consumer Awareness Orientation

The chapter that launched the language consumer awareness orientation, Cohen and White (2008), was based on questions about how applied linguists could add value to the aspirations of language learners in the wide variety of language learning contexts they would encounter and/or create for themselves. To this end Andrew had developed a pilot seminar at the University of Minnesota in 2003 entitled "Alternatives in becoming comfortably multilingual" which exposed students to numerous, diverse approaches to learning a language; the aim was they would be more informed and more resourceful in the choices they make in selecting and combining language learning opportunities which also suit their needs (this is the subject of the next section).

At that time the expansion and diversification of language learning opportunities that had emerged over the preceding decades (e.g. study abroad options, self-access learning, online technologies, mobile language learning) meant there had been a growing awareness of the need to understand and support language learners in deciding which second language they would choose to learn as well as where, how, when, why and with whom (see for example Kramsch and Thorne (2002), and Little (2001), for examples from that time in relation to tandem learning and telecollaborative projects). However, what was different about the informed consumer approach to supporting learners was two-fold: firstly, the focus on field work and reflection by students as they researched and critiqued options available to them, and secondly the focus on what it meant to be more savvy in making decisions and choices given the multitude of options available for language learning in the 21st century. The notion of the 'informed consumer' was not seen in neoliberal terms where students are positioned as customers purchasing education as a service but in rather more empowering terms: the focus was on individuals as they seek out and critically appraise particular language learning options in terms of where to best spend their time, energy and resources in L2 learning. The interest centred on two questions: how might we characterise truly informed consumers when it comes to learning an L2? What would these truly informed consumers be like?

Alternatives in Becoming Comfortably Multilingual

The pilot undergraduate course developed by Andrew at the University of Minnesota aimed to develop student expertise and know-how in language learning in relation to in-class and out-of-class contexts; on that basis it was envisaged that the students would be able to identify the opportunities and limitations in particular language learning opportunities and in relation to their individual needs.

A defining feature of the informed consumer approach which underpinned the seminar is that making *informed* choices "requires knowledge and skills which cannot be assumed" (Cohen & White, 2008 p.185). The approach taken to developing that knowledge and skills in making informed judgements was twofold: firstly to introduce students to key issues and concepts about the nature and process of language learning (including relevant metalanguage), and then to apply those concepts to an exploration and evaluation of a wide range of language learning

opportunities. Within this approach students participated in four interrelated areas of work (see Cohen & White 2008 for further details):

(a) Developing a basic framework for the field
(b) Developing basic concepts and metalanguage
(c) Investigating methodology in context: student projects
(d) Critical reflection via online journals

In the seminar students articulated the links they made between the basic concepts, metalanguage and framework for the field and their student projects and reflections: they did this by making reference to the published literature, the ideas discussed in class and in the online forums and their critical reflections on the realities they encountered as language learners, teachers and researchers.

Importantly, the "Alternatives in Becoming Comfortably Multilingual" seminar encouraged students to move beyond more familiar routes for L2 learning: it aimed to open their eyes to the rich array of opportunities available to them for learning languages within their immediate community: for the project (c. above) students were encouraged to identify the language learning opportunities available in their environment (both formal and informal) and to explore and compare at least two of them. That richness of perspective was evident in the languages chosen (American Sign Language, Hebrew and Afrikaans for example), the sites of exploration (for example, a high school French class taught by a Total Physical Response storytelling method) and the roles taken by students in relation to the language learning opportunities. One of the students, Chelsea, reflected on her learning of Afrikaans during her 8 month stay in South Africa and she interviewed two study abroad students, one who had been to South America, the other Spain; in terms of her current learning of Spanish she compared her experiences in two beginners classes at college (one of which included a technology-mediated component), she reflected on the value of attending bilingual church services (Spanish/English) and on opportunities within the congregation to practice Spanish, and she kept a journal of the language she learned while tutoring two young Spanish-speaking children.

Through the reports of the Minnesota University students we have insights into the means by which they make informed choices about language learning options based on the alternatives available and in relation to their individual needs. This view of language learners as individuals who actively seek out and evaluate the possibilities for language learning in their context, aligns with studies of what is required of distance and online language learners where learning opportunities are not directly mediated and orchestrated by the teacher moment by moment (White 2003). The Cohen and White article has been cited in a number of studies on technology-mediated language learning including Walker and Haddon (2011), Lai and Morrison (2013), Lai, Shum and Tian (2016) and Lam (2018). A common focus of this research is the need to develop awareness of the potential of technology-mediated learning environments and the relevant knowledge and skills which would support the active and effective use of those environments. Later in this article we look in more detail at the informed consumer approach in technology-

mediated environments in research centred on electronic dictionary use (Levy & Steel 2015) and on the trajectories of distance learners of Chinese (Tasker 2010).

The Significance of Informed Choice for Language Learners

We now take a step back to provide a broader perspective on what it means to make choices as an informed language learner beginning with the decision to learn a particular target language. In making that preliminary decision students may, for example, be less prepared for some of the complexities associated with particular target languages which may include such features as tones or a syllabic script. To give one example, Bown and White (2010a) report on the affective reaction of one student, John, a highly competent physics student used to dealing with symbols who had chosen to learn Russian and reported "I picked up the book originally and looked at all these words and I thought, "Boy, this is going to be nasty." Because, you know, I obviously couldn't even recognize the symbols and couldn't write them".Cohen (2018) develops this point noting that while many learners choose a language with little awareness of the specific challenges it presents, a rigorous language aptitude measure, Hi-Lab, has been developed and shown to reliably indicate which individuals are more suited to learning particular languages based on the features of those languages. Thus, having more knowledge about the language in focus vis-à-vis individual aptitude may be a useful guide in the future to making judicious choices and building individual awareness.

A second key choice is for students to identify the approach to language learning which best suits their needs and then to draw on this knowledge as they evaluate the possibilities in their environment. In a study of heritage learners of Italian in New Zealand, Berardi-Wiltshire (2012) gives the case of Marianne who had enrolled in language classes hoping to get a deeper knowledge of the fundamentals of Italian grammar, to underpin her longer-term learning goals. She was thus disappointed to hear her teacher state in the Italian evening class she attended that there would be no grammar teaching, and that instead the focus was on vocabulary and expressions that would be useful for those who were planning to travel to Italy as tourists. In such a setting Marianne found it difficult to maintain her motivation: had she been more aware of the limitations of that approach at the outset she may have chosen another path, one that would be more supportive of her identity as a heritage learner of Italian and of her "identity-related aspirations" (Berardi-Wiltshire 2012, p. 6).

Being an informed consumer of language instruction ideally means that it is possible to choose teachers, language partners, and native speaker interlocutors according to the benefit they derive from particular interactions. There are numerous examples of learners making these choices in the research literature: Bown and White (2010b) trace the trajectory of one student, Janice, who early on changes her Russian tutor to one who better meets her needs in terms of her proficiency level and the ways in which the tutor engages her in conversation. Thus, decisions in terms of approach focus not only on method of instruction but also interactive opportunities afforded by different language teachers, partners and native speakers. An interesting example of this is in relation to private language tuition: Cuong and White (2018) referring to a longitudinal

study of Vietnamese high school learners of English reveal how it is the possibility for students to ask questions, to get feedback, to be mentored and encouraged by the teacher which is central to their decision to take private tuition.

Once language learning is underway, awareness and knowledge continue to underpin the ongoing work of the informed consumer of language instruction. For example, learners are able to draw on their knowledge of instructional approaches to identify what is happening at a particular moment and how they can configure those opportunities to best effect in accordance with their learning needs. Thus informed consumers need to be able to work at different levels in applying their knowledge and skills and in developing awareness of what is taking place: they are able to operate on more macro-level decisions (such as choice of target language and the balance of formal and informal learning opportunities) as well as zooming in at particular moments to identify what is happening and how best to work with the affordances at that moment. In formal instruction this might involve the ability to identify the purpose of a particular stage of a task, and in informal opportunities could involve identifying how to sustain a particularly rewarding conversation.

Being an informed consumer means knowing how and when to identify the advantages and challenges at particular moments and why this is important in becoming comfortably multilingual. It means knowing that learning a language does not come as a ready-made package with assured outcomes: it requires a good deal of self-knowledge, persistence and an ability to identify and work towards the rewards that lie ahead. Later on we will discuss this point in more detail in relation to Isabel Tasker's (2010) longitudinal study of the language learning trajectories of distance learners of Chinese. But here are three examples from that study where students identify a wide range of rewards of language learning, the sense of achievement they gain, the knowledge of themselves that grows over time and the joys of learning particular languages: Scott notes "It's like getting a pay packet: to get the goodies there has to be a lot of work but I feel satisfaction"; Lola who identifies that the puzzles of Chinese continue to be enticing "Now, learning Chinese is like trying to solve a puzzle that becomes more difficult, the closer you get to figuring it out"; Stella who views learning Chinese as similar to hard physical effort over time with great rewards "It's like walking on a LONG, lone road where I'm just starting to see the beautiful views ahead" (Tasker, 2010, p. 162).

To conclude this section on the significance of informed choice we review the six themes identified in Cohen and White (2008) which were derived from students' accounts of taking an informed consumer approach. These emergent themes provide further vantage points from which to appreciate the value of the informed consumer approach, the sense of sureness that that approach gave students during their language learning journey and the ways in which they fine-tuned their experiences to optimise the value they gained. The salience of each theme to the informed consumer is outlined briefly below.

1. Exploration and awareness: it is in seeking out and exploring the affordances of different approaches to language learning that individuals develop their awareness and understanding of different options; the interplay between exploration and awareness

highlights the ways in which they are mutually constitutive during the course of language learning

2. Added value: processes of reflecting on language learning options and of identifying optimal ways of configuring experiences add value to the processes of language learning including in a sense of confidence in the decisions that are taken

3. Lifelong learning: the knowledge and awareness which individuals develop as informed consumers is of themselves and their needs as well as of the process of language learning; such knowledge and awareness underpins lifelong learning and is thus of value across wider contexts and longer timescales

4. Exercising choice: exercising choice and deciding how to act are key features of the processes of being an informed consumer of language learning opportunities; those decisions then shape the learning context and ultimately the trajectory of language learning opportunities of individuals

5. Making connections between experiences: it is in making connections between experiences that individuals are also able to evaluate how well a particular activity meets their needs and to supplement activities to either cover gaps in their experience or introduce more features which have proved useful for language learning in other settings.

6. Critical evaluation: the experience of and practice in reflecting on language learning contexts and opportunities is fundamental to being able to critically evaluate the host of language learning opportunities one is likely to encounter as a language learner; having a basic framework of the field and both the concepts and metalanguage are key tools in those critical evaluation processes

We now turn to a more detailed examination of how the informed consumer approach has been used, referring to two studies of technology-mediated language learning: Levy and Steel (2015) and Tasker (2010).

Expertise and Affordances in Relation to Electronic Language Dictionaries

Levy and Steel (2015) draw on several strands of the notion of the informed consumer in their study of the nature and extent of electronic dictionary use by tertiary language learners in one Australian university where languages are offered in a blended mode: they focus on language learning across ten languages inside class, outside class or both. The 2011 data was gathered in a large-scale survey (n=587) which included both quantitative and qualitative response items. Students identified the top three technologies they used as online dictionaries, web-based translators, and online movies accessed via YouTube. Importantly, but not surprisingly, the study demonstrates that students' use of technology extends far beyond 'the centrally provisioned technologies made available through their institutional studies' (Levy 2015: 557); in fact the institutional technologies did not figure prominently in the results. Given the prominence of electronic dictionaries in the findings, Levy and Steel then give analytical attention to the comments from students on how they accessed and used the dictionary-type resources in terms of usability (which broadly speaking refers to ease of use) and functionality (again, broadly

speaking, this refers to the use and purpose for which something is designed). From this, they conclude that many students made sophisticated use of electronic dictionaries which have multiple functions available within a single tool. In terms of usability they noted, among other things, that "the devices also gave them choice, as consumers, about the applications they could select for download as suited to their purposes and preferences" (Levy & Steel, 2015, p. 193), emphasising how individuals curate the features of the electronic dictionaries they use. Citing Cohen and White (2008), Levy and Steel, then observe that the ability to discriminate between options and to then make informed choices depends on ability and expertise: they continue that "this expertise, where it exists, is being accumulated independently by individual learners through trial and error" (p. 194). In this, they point to the nature of being and becoming an informed consumer, as an iterative rather than linear process. They conclude that in their study of electronic dictionary use "there is evidence that points to a cadre of knowledgeable and discerning users" (p. 195), arguing that more research is needed to "unpack both the range and detail of user behaviour and the conditions of use" (ibid.).

Importantly in a discussion of the Levy and Steel study, Levy (2015) observes that given that learners now have their own personal and powerful technologies that are capable of supporting their independence, qualitative research methods are critical if the personal choices of language learners in response to specific affordances are to become visible. Here Levy is referring to a key point in the discussion of the language learner as informed consumer: "we…have a view of language learners who actively construct and fashion a way of learning for themselves based on the alternatives available" (p. 200). It is precisely those processes which present and remain a broader challenge to the field of applied linguistics: if we are to be truly informed about the realities of language learning in the 21st century, then we need to better understand how language learners access, use and bring together different tools and contexts moment by moment to meet their particular language learning needs and goals. Levy (2015) gives further emphasis to this point noting that the tools and technologies available to learners quite literally at their fingertips are "powerful, expansive and changing" (p. 557). Elaborating on this point, Levy and Steel suggest that the teacher's role is best configured as a facilitator "to help structure and encourage the sharing of knowledge among student users" (p. 194), noting that professional development is required to underpin that shift in the teacher's role. A further perspective on the use of electronic dictionaries is given in a (2019) study by Cohen and Wang, in which they zoom into the vocabulary learning strategies used by a hyperglot when learning Chinese. Specifically, they take a fine-grained approach to investigate how that particular learner 'fine-tuned' his understanding of vocabulary through mobile apps, online programmes and interactions with a tutor. A key conclusion is that such a research approach can illuminate the complexities, challenges and opportunities related to accessing various kinds of dictionaries; such research can then contribute to our understanding of the ways in which individuals can become better-informed consumers of L2 learning opportunities.

Trajectories and Informed Choice of Distance Learners of Chinese

The trajectories of Australian learners of Chinese studying by distance and the ways in which they choose and combine language learning opportunities was the subject of an in-depth qualitative study carried out by Isabel Tasker. Tasker (2010) reports on a survey of 41 adults who had been studying Chinese for at least two years; she investigates the chronology of their language learning episodes, noting that language learning tends to be an ongoing pursuit, encompassing an interplay of formal and informal learning opportunities (Kennett, 2003). For this group of learners of Chinese, many had what she describes as "an early encounter with learning Chinese then much later resuming or restarting their study by a different means" (p. 162). The early informal experiences included community-based teaching or evening classes, independent learning using 'teach yourself' courses, and local tuition during visits to China. Tasker identifies that students consciously chose university study often because of "its planned and guided nature" (ibid). She also observes that distance learners, like many other language learners, do not follow an unbroken, linear trail in their learning and that many may be reviving a long-held goal which can underpin their motivation to study.

From this study we have a view of how learners combine their different learning sources – for example the distance learning course tended to be seen as something of an additional source of material for learners based in Chinese-speaking countries which provided not only structure, but a means of gauging progress, as well as a formal qualification. Importantly Tasker emphasises that the students she interviewed were not simply passive consumers of language learning materials, but were highly discriminating in selecting and combining appropriate materials that met their needs; when gaps emerged in what was available to serve their interests and needs they were proactive in seeking alternatives so that they could continue their momentum as learners. Tasker draws further on the orientation of the informed consumer approach noting that the profile and skills demonstrated by many of the learners in her study aligned with those required of new generations of language learners "faced with an increasing array of choices in terms of learning environments, learning partners and learning experiences" (Cohen & White, 2008, p. 203). The study illustrated that such learners then need to be able to make informed judgements at a host of decision points: how they can best invest in language learning (in terms of time, energy and resources), how they can identify quality learning experiences, and the ways of optimising those experiences. A further finding from the Tasker study which aligns with the informed consumer approach is the value of reflection on their individual learning journey and approaches which have been 'crafted from various episodes and sources" (Tasker p. 168): she notes that such reflections tended to act as a trigger to remind them of the pleasures of learning Chinese and to revive their interest in the learning of Chinese.

In the next section we consider the experiences and reflections of learners of Arabic in a study abroad context in Jordan in terms of the informed consumer approach and the new dimensions that are revealed in that context in terms of informed providers.

Project Perseverance

Project Perseverance was launched in 2010 by the National Middle East Learning Language Resource Center (NMELRC with the aim of "empowering students to become effective self-regulating language learners, particularly in intensive in-country study settings" (Belnap, Bown, Dewey, Belnap, & Steffen, 2016, p. 284). Andrew Cohen was one of the founding members of the Project Perseverance team, who consulted in its design and implementation. As a specialist in learner strategies, Andrew provided suggestions as to possible program interventions, and the name "Project Perseverance" is his brainchild. The project has become an integral part of the intensive study abroad program in Jordan, and extensive literature is available on the project (see, for example, Belnap, Bown, Bown, Fitting, & White, 2018; Bown, Dewey, & Belnap, 2015; and Wilson, 2015). The project website (http://nmelrc.org/Pathways) provides students with online training materials in the form of videos of training sessions, biofeedback resources, summaries of relevant research and learner success stories from a variety of study abroad contexts, with an emphasis on stories relevant to the Middle East.

Prior to departing on study abroad, students are required to participate in a seven-week preparation course, meeting weekly for approximately 90 minutes. Topics include an overview of the program, Jordanian history and culture, challenges that students would likely encounter, and strategies for making the most of their time in-country, including strategies for managing adverse emotions and accessing conversational opportunities. In Jordan, students are supported by a program director and by Teaching Assistants—former participants in the study abroad program who serve as role models and mentors.

During study abroad in Jordan, in addition to course work, students are required to spend two hours a day (five days per week) speaking Arabic with native speakers. They are further required to report online about their speaking experiences, providing information about how much time they spent finding people to talk with, how well they were able to understand, and their overall satisfaction with their speaking experiences. In addition, students write weekly journal entries reflecting on their language learning experiences and planning for the coming week. Suggested questions include "What did you do that went well?" "What things did I do to encourage speaking and what things did I do to shut off opportunities that may have presented themselves?" Journaling allows students to critically evaluate their language learning processes, to explore the affordances of their in-country experience, and to make connections among their experiences, their behaviors, and their goals. As part of the informed consumer approach, Cohen and White (2008) identify the value of providing an explicit focus on reflection that is recognised and valued as integral to the program: this was the case in Project Perseverance with the additional dimension of a focus on noticing, managing and working with affectively-demanding experiences.

Other interventions offered as part of Project Perseverance include "Group Processing Sessions" and "Skill-building training." The goal of the group processing sessions is to help students deal with unrealistic expectations, culture shock and other sources of stress" (Belnap, Bown, Dewey, Belnap, & Steffen, 2016, p. 288). This 20-30 minute session, held towards the

end of the school week often begins with program directors or previous participants offering insights from their own experiences in order to encourage other students to share. Students are then given time to share their own challenges in small groups, volunteer suggestions and celebrate successes. This open group discussion helps learners feel that they are not alone in their challenges and helps them learn about options for coping with challenges or for making their overall experience more productive. The emphasis here on appraising options and making choices which optimise experiences aligns with the informed consumer approach. In addition to the group processing sessions, students participate in weekly skill-building training during which they receive training in particular linguistic skills or social skills that might help them during their program. For instance, learners might receive training as to how to describe future plans. Or they might learn about how to keep a conversation going.

Over the last decade, Belnap and colleagues have collected data from over 400 students, including interview transcripts, journal entries, surveys and daily speaking logs. The quotations herein are culled from three different publications. These data document the program's success in helping learners become informed consumers, that is learners who are aware of the program's goals and methods and who exercise choice in their language learning activities according to their individual needs. In this way, learners can "buy in" to the shared endeavor, trusting that the curriculum design and related opportunities promote language learning:

"I am realizing more and more, since the two processing sessions we have done with the [SA director], just what this program is and how it has been proven successful. I am understanding more about what it is aiming to do for me, and where I can expect to be level-wise with Arabic by the time I come home. I understand that this is a life-long investment, and I am barely now getting a realistic picture of where I am with Arabic, and where I can get if I do everything that I am personally up for doing in this program." (Participant 4, journal entry 1/18/15—Belnap, Bown, Bown, Fitting, & White, 2018)

Though this learner demonstrates some trust in the design of the program, he also recognizes that his resources are limited and that he can only do that which he is "personally up for doing in this program." Thus, as an informed consumer, he must select learning activities to maximise available resources. Moreover, the learner has come to recognize that learning a foreign language is a "life-long" process.

The journal entries and interviews are replete with examples of learners exercising choice, even in environments that initially appeared devoid of opportunities for choice. One learner felt that his instructor dominated lessons, providing few opportunities for learners to practice. He reported, "In order to change how I felt this week, I started to make it into a game where I try to "fight" her for speaking time…By doing this I stay engaged in the class and get needed speaking time" (Participant 5, journal, 9/10/15 Belnap, Bown, Bown, Fitting, & White, 2018).

Students participating in Project Perseverance report that traditional gender roles in the Middle East can limit opportunities for interaction. Thus, one of the tasks of Project Perseverance is to help students work within the sociocultural environment in order to find opportunities to interact in socially appropriate ways with native speakers. For example, one

female student felt that her gender prevented her from befriending an elderly male tailor. She exercised choice within the constraints of the culture by taking male students from the program to meet with him the first few times. These initial visits allowed her to meet the tailor's daughters and to be invited into the home (Wilson, 2015).

Daily speaking logs and weekly journal entries allowed the learners to engage in self-reflection and to make connections among experiences. One learner reports that after a successful speaking appointment, she wrote down exactly what she felt had made it successful and then tried to replicate those circumstances as much as possible (Wilson, 2015). Another student wrote that writing in her journal and reflecting on her progress helped her to discover her "competitive feelings and negative feelings about others." As a result, she "changed the way that [she] found people [to converse with]—[she] found more steady partners that would be more patient with [her]" (Participant 38, Belnap, Bown, Dewey, Belnap, & Steffen, 2016).

The data collected from Project Perseverance not only document the program's success in helping learners become informed consumers, they also inform the design of the program itself. In this way, Project Perseverance helps not only the "consumers" but also the providers. For example, early in the project, administrators and researchers discovered that student interactions with native speakers were largely superficial and rarely led to the kinds of interactions that would involve negotiation of meaning or facilitate significant proficiency development. Based on that feedback, program administrators hired speaking partners to speak one-on-one with each student for 30 minutes a day. Moreover, the program trained the speaking partners in techniques for eliciting higher quality language from learners in order to help learners develop their ability to narrate and describe in the target language. Learners were also given training on particular skills and strategies. When it became clear that some learners found it difficult to engage in any conversations beyond the usual exchange of pleasantries, program administrators taught learners the acronym FORTE (family, occupation, recreation, travel, and education) to help learners prepare topics that will help them to tell their stories, become more acquainted with their interlocutors, and form friendships.

Thus, a key conclusion from Project Perseverance is that when learners are seen as informed consumers, instructors and curriculum developers must also see themselves as "informed" providers. Formative evaluation is central to the Arabic study abroad program and to Project Perseverance. The participation of both students and providers in Project Perseverance has resulted in all involved parties becoming more personally invested in the program, allowing all stakeholders to take responsibility for the quality of the learning experience. Being an informed provider is a sustained process that encompasses each stage and dimension of language learning. Cohen and White identify an aspect of the informed consumer metaphor which parallels the kinds of follow-up services available: in this case as an informed provider it involves ongoing support for learners whereby they can get a response and guidance to their issues and concerns as part of a quality learning experience, with a focus on enabling them to work with a wide range of experiences. The Project Perseverance program reveals how the ongoing analysis of the student

experience feeds back into the work of instructors and curriculum developers who are committed to the enhancement of all aspects of the students' learning experiences in study abroad.

Conclusion

This article has given analytical attention to the fundamentals of the notion of the informed consumer and the ways in which that research has evolved since Cohen and White (2008). We have identified how the informed consumer approach is quite distinctive from other approaches to supporting and enhancing language learning, including its emphasis on developing a framework and metalanguage, emphasis on field work and on discriminating from amongst a myriad of choices at each stage and level of language learning. This approach opens up a broadened and more detailed perspective on what is required of language learners in selecting particular learning environments, in combining them with other learning opportunities, in critically reflecting on what those environments afford them, and in finding ways to add value to their experiences. Importantly it provides us with a rich picture of the ways in which and the degree to which they navigate, adapt and curate their individual learning experiences from a range of alternatives, in line with individual and emergent learning needs: it is in appraising and selecting different interlocutors, tasks and task combinations that learners develop both knowledge of themselves as language learners and how different learning experiences can contribute to their developing language skills, including moment by moment.

Thus, the notion of informed consumer encompasses not just active learning but also critical adaptive learning, which centres on how individuals select, respond to and shape the particular features and affordances of their language learning environment, moment by moment (White, 2011). In this article we have pointed to how studies have extended the informed consumer research to understand the ways students curate their use of new technologies (in this case electronic dictionaries) and the ways they construct and chart their Chinese language learning trajectories within and across different learning contexts and opportunities. We have also shown how research in relatively under-explored contexts for language learning (as in Jordanian study abroad and Project Perseverance) can open up new dimensions of what it means to be an informed consumer of language instruction in accordance with specific situational and cultural norms and constraints. Importantly, that study suggests that resources for understanding informed consumer approaches to L2 instruction can be significantly reshaped and expanded to include the embodied experience of language learning (as in gender roles), and the affective demands placed on learners, while arguing that informed consumers need informed providers who are deeply responsive to their emergent needs. One dimension of the informed consumer approach which has as yet been underexplored is the focus on extending learners' awareness of the myriad of exciting and diverse possibilities available to them in their immediate environment. It is in seeking out, appraising and engaging with those interlocutors, digital artefacts, spaces, networks and communities, and in working with the opportunities they afford, that they become personally meaningful sites for language learning and as part of their everyday lives.

References

Berardi-Wiltshire, A. (2012). Reframing the foreign language classroom to accommodate the heritage language learner: A study of heritage identity and language learning motivation. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics*, *18*(2), 21-34.

Belnap, R.K., Bown, J., Dewey, D.P., Belnap, L.P., & Steffen, P.R. (2016). Project perseverance: Helping students become self-regulating learners. In P.D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen, & S. Mercer (Eds). *Positive Psychology in SLA* (pp. 282-300). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Belnap, R.K., Bown, J., Bown, T., Fitting, C., & White, A. (2018). Project perseverance and journaling: Toward creating a culture of engagement during study abroad. In Sanz, C., & Morales-Front, A. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of study abroad research and practice* (pp. 246-260). New York: Routledge.

Bown, J. & C. White (2010a). Affect in a self-regulatory framework for language learning. *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics, 38*(3), 432-443.

Bown, J. & White, C. (2010b). A social and cognitive approach to affect in SLA. *IRAL*, *48*(4): 331-353.

Chamot, A. U., & Harris, V. (Eds.). (2019). *Learning strategy instruction in the language classroom: Issues and implementation*. Multilingual Matters.

Cohen, A. D. (2010). Focus on the language learner: Styles, strategies and motivation. *An introduction to applied linguistics*, *2*, 161-178.

Cohen, A. D. (2018). Reflections on a career in second language studies: Promising pathways for future research. *L2 Journal*, *10*(1), 1-19.

Cohen, A.D. &Wang, I.K.H., 2019. Fine-tuning word meanings through mobile app and online resources: A case study of strategy use by a hyper polyglot. *System*, *85*, 102-118.

Cohen, A. D., & White, C. (2008). Language learners as informed consumers of language instruction. In I. Kupferberg & A. Stavans (Eds). *Studies in language and language education* (pp. 185-205). Jerusalem, Israel: Magness, Hebrew University Press.

Cuong, P.,& White, C. (2018) Rural students' motivation for learning English: implications for transition to tertiary education. In J. Allwright (ed.) *English ertiary education in Vietnam* (pp. 132-144). New York: Routledge.

Kennett, B. (2003). *Resourcing identities: biographies of Australians learning Japanese.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Australia.

Lai, C., & Morrison, B. (2013). Towards an agenda for learner preparation in technology-enhanced language learning environments. *CALICO Journal*, *30*(2), 154-162.

Lai, C., Shum, M., & Tian, Y. (2016). Enhancing learners' self-directed use of technology for language learning: the effectiveness of an online training platform. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *29*(1), 40-60.

Lam, C. Y. (2018). *A reflective account of two Hong Kong sub-degree college students engaged in independent learning of English as a second language* (Doctoral dissertation, Nottingham Trent University).

Levy, M. (2015). The role of qualitative approaches to research in CALL contexts: Closing in on the learner's experience. *CALICO Journal*, *32*(3), 554-568.

Levy, M., & Steel, C. (2015). Language learner perspectives on the functionality and use of electronic language dictionaries. *ReCALL*, *27*(2), 177-196.

Tasker, I. (2010). Intermediate distance learners of Chinese look back: A survey study. In M. Everson & H. Shen (eds.) *Research among learners of Chinese as a foreign language*, *4*(pp. 153-177). Honolulu, HI: National Foreign Language Resource Center

Walker, U., & Haddon, R. (2011). Foreign language learning conceptualisations of distance learners in New Zealand: goals, challenges and responses. *The Language Learning Journal*, *39*(3), 345-364

Wilson, J. (2015). *Access, gender, and agency on study abroad: Four case studies of female students in Jordan.* (Unpublished master's thesis). Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.