

CHAPTER 4

INDIVIDUAL CASES

The case studies, which took a year to complete, consist of descriptions of the experiences of four junior high school students in 8th grade: Natalie, Jasmine, Tom and Gin Pin. Their names are pseudonymous in order to protect the students. These four students have different English learning backgrounds and are of varied English listening proficiency levels.

In order to better understand the four students' English listening strategy use and how they make sense of their learning through listening strategy instruction, it's very important to also bear in mind the learners' attitudes toward English learning and their beliefs about their roles in learning, as both will ultimately affect their learning and listening strategy use. In other words, their English learning experiences and their attitudes toward learner autonomy will influence their perceptions and their learning of listening strategies. According to Ames (1986), the effectiveness of the learner must be examined in relation to those beliefs and perceptions that enable learners to become involved, independent, and confident in their own learning.

Therefore, the researcher will discuss the four students' learning attitude at the very beginning of this chapter. This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I first elucidate their family background, their English performance at school, and their learning attitudes to foreground the description of their experiences on listening strategy use and learning. In the second part, I discuss the extent to which each of the four students can be considered a good learner based on the characteristics of good language learners described by Ellis (1999). Their use of listening strategies and the problems these four students encountered during the process of learning will be

discussed in Chapter 5 by cross-case analysis.

For the first part, according to Wenden (1991), to make the strategy instruction successful, it's crucial to encourage learner autonomy; that is not only to help students learn how to learn but also to help the learner “acquire the *attitude* that enables them to use the strategies or skills more confidently, flexibly, appropriately and independently of a teacher” (1991, 15). And these attitudes that are crucial to learner autonomy could include what learners believe about their roles in the learning process or about their capabilities as language learners. To put it differently, attitudes have three dimensions—cognitive, affective, and behavioral, which suggest that learners need to probe beyond their definition of what it means to learn a language and how to determine whether they feel they should take on the responsibility for their learning and are capable of doing so (Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Wenden, 1998; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). The cognitive component comprises what a person knows or believes about the object of the attitude. The affective component is the degree of like or dislike, approval or disapproval associated with the attitudinal object, such as the teacher and the class. The behavioral component consists of attitudes that predispose people to act in a certain way (Zhengdong Gan, Gillian Humphreys, & Liz Hamp-Lyons, 2004).

The researcher focused on two questions in discussing the attitude as well as the metacognitive aspects toward English learning of these four cases. Two questions, raised by Wenden (1991), serve as the guidance of this preliminary stage of analysis. They are a) What are the attitudes learners hold about their roles in the language learning process? and b) To what extent can the learners be treated as good learners?

This study attempts to discuss family backgrounds, school performance, and attitudes toward learning of the four learners, respectively, in this chapter based upon

an analysis of the interview, the learning journal of the four cases and the observation of the researcher.

4.1 The Case Profile

4.1.1 Natalie

(A) Natalie's Family Background

Natalie comes from a wealthy family. Being the only child in her family, she receives all the attention of her parents. Natalie's father is a retired steward of China Airlines, and wishes to give her the best kind of lifestyle and education. To provide Natalie the best lifestyle, her father endeavors to offer her an environment that includes vacations to many foreign countries, like the United States, Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, and especially Mainland China. The family has two houses in Mainland China, at which they regularly stay during summer and winter vacations. Thus, Natalie has had a large variety of intercultural exposure and more chances to go abroad than the other students.

Natalie's father also strives to equip her with the best education. He not only makes sure that Natalie attended the best possible school, but also tutors her personally. Being a retired steward of China Airlines and having confidence in his own English ability, Natalie's father insisted on teaching Natalie personally how to learn English and has required her to memorize 20 English words each day ever since she was about five years old. He set himself as a good model in learning English for Natalie by requiring himself to memorize an English dictionary, word by word, ever since Natalie was a little girl. He also provides her with many strategies or tips to learn English. To teach Natalie how to memorize unknown words more efficiently, he invented particular mnemonics and required Natalie to spend five days to review the

words so as to recognize the words immediately once she saw them. Natalie explained in the interview about her father's system in helping her memorize English words in the following way:

Actually this method requires me to separate the process of memorizing words into five different steps, which takes five days to accomplish. On the first day, you have to look at the storybook and write the new words down on the paper. And you have to know how to pronounce the word. On the second day, you have to write the words in two different languages, Chinese and English, on the same piece of paper so that you can see them in two different languages at the same time. On the first two days, you have to cover the English word and say it loud by looking at the Chinese translation. On the third and fourth day, you have to cover the Chinese translation and say the meaning of the English word in Chinese by just looking at the English word. And on the last day, you have to try to fix them in your mind by writing them down.

(From the first interview, December 12th, 2005)

Under this kind of education, Natalie is strongly influenced by her father's tutoring and his cautious attitude toward learning. However, Natalie's perception of her father's tutoring is not really positive. When asked about her feelings toward learning English in the interview, we had the following dialogue:

Researcher: What's your feeling about learning English? Do you find it hard, easy, interesting, or boring? Do you like to learn English? Why?

Natalie: When I was a little girl, I felt it was really boring because my father always made me memorize 20 vocabulary words every day, but now I feel better.

Researcher: Why did you feel bored when you were a child?

Natalie: Because at that time, my father would push me to study English every day. I think it is really boring when you are forced to do something you don't really like.

Researcher: So you don't like your father pushing you to study.

Natalie: No!

I don't.

Researcher: Can you tell me how he pushed you?

Natalie: He doesn't have a lot of patience and most of the time he would teach me and lose his patience and scold me. So I don't like to be taught by him.

(From the first interview, December 12th, 2005)

This interview revealed that her feelings toward her father's tutoring were negative when she was young. She did not like being pushed by her father, but she has found it useful now. In a follow-up discussion, she explained to me the reason that she changed her perception toward her father's tutoring. She said,

It was not until I got into junior high school that I found I seemed to be able to memorize the words more efficiently than my friends. I used to think that everybody would do the same as I do when memorizing words. But now I know it is not like that. Not every one of my classmates knows how to do it more efficiently. So I have started to feel that my father's method for memorizing words is useful to me now.

(From a discussion in the break between classes)

According to my long-term observation as a teacher, Natalie is already able to approach English more efficiently when compared to other classmates. Every time I was instructing a new listening strategy, she was always the first one to give me immediate feedback and opinions about this strategy. Accordingly, when the whole class were practicing with the strategy, she was also the fastest student to do the activities right. It seems to me that she had already applied these strategies for a long time before my instruction and was quite familiar with these strategies. She wrote in the learning journal about her perception of the learned strategies, "I already know how to apply these strategies before the instruction. The instruction itself only makes me feel surer and even more confident of my use of strategies" (from the learning journal).

(B) Natalie's Performance at School

Perhaps because of her family support, Natalie's performance at school is always above the average; actually, her academic report puts her in the top 5% of her class (See Table 4.1.1).

Table 4.1.1 *Summary of Natalie's Performance*

Rank	Student	Average of Weekly Listening Test on A+ Magazine	Sample GEPT LT (Total Score 120)	Average of Monthly Tests
2 nd	Natalie	93.3	108	99
Mean of the whole class		55.54	77.411	72.662
Summary	1. The top 2nd of her class.			
	2. A more skilled listener.			
	3. Strong self-regulation and self-management ability.			
	4. Has high motivation to learn only to please someone she trusts.			

Among her four skills, her listening ability is the best, and then writing and reading skills, followed by oral speaking skill. As a teacher, I think Natalie as a person with two important abilities that are crucial for an independent learner: a) strong self-regulation and b) self-management.

a) Natalie's strong self-regulation

Natalie commands strong self-regulation in several ways. For example, she is always ambitious, going beyond my expectation by doing extra-homework hard and with much effort. She insisted on keeping an English journal for every day although I didn't ask her to do so. She talked on the MSN in English with her friend Ellisa, one of her good friends who had immigrated to the USA when she was in third grade. She read some best-selling English novels which have been made into motion pictures like *Harry Potter*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia* actively. She had just finished the book *The Da Vinci Code* and had started reading *Angels and Demons*. In addition, she asked for extra outside reading homework for herself. They are abridged versions of novels such as *Tom Sawyer*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and *Three Musketeers*. She

did all these reading and writing activities out of her own volition without being asked. Her self-regulation can be shown in the following event. Early at the beginning stage of this study, I gave the whole class a chance to see the film *Lord of the Flies*. We had a follow-up activity to discuss the perceptions which they had noted down on their worksheet after watching the film. Natalie's comments revealed that she found this film "horrible and disgusting" because as a girl scout, she couldn't believe that people would treat their friends so cruelly as depicted in the film. Since she did not like this film at all, it was even harder for her to further discuss or explore it. Therefore, she did not write much about her opinion on the worksheet, which was quite contrary to what she usually does. To my surprise, later at the closing stage of this study, I found that she was reading this English novel in my class. What really amazed me was that she was willing to conquer her negative perception of the film and read the novel out of her own volition. It seemed to me that her interest in the novel had been aroused because of the chance to watch the film. Responding to my question about the reason why she was willing to read this novel, she told me that she read this novel not only for herself, but also for a good friend. Her friend was required by a cram school teacher to read this novel; only that her friend could not understand the novel and had asked her for help. Natalie gained a sense of achievement from being able to answer her friend's questions. Meanwhile, she was convinced that this novel must be worth reading because not only me but also other teachers had recommended students to read it. Therefore, she required herself to read the book quickly and became completely absorbed in it. This event showed me that she developed her interest in reading through the social interaction between herself and other people around her. This was clearly an example of how a child developed from the stage of "other-regulation" to "self-regulation", to use Vygotsky's term.

b) Natalie's self-management

Other than her ability in self-regulation, Natalie also demonstrates great self-management in learning: she plans, monitors, and evaluates herself regularly. Self-management strategies have been referred to as metacognitive or self-regulated skill in cognitive psychology to mean the strategies that are utilized by learners to oversee and manage their own learning (Brown et al, 1983). According to my observation and also the result of the listening questionnaire conducted at the beginning of this study, she made it a rule to plan for her listening task by writing down in a list what she needed to do on a memo in advance and rechecking all the items one by one, crossing out the things she had completed.

Natalie's listening strategy use also suggests that she is indeed a learner with good self-management. For example, every time before I gave the class a listening comprehension test, I saw that she prepared herself to be fully concentrated by sitting well and putting away all the books or other things to make her desk clean and neat, and then she scanned the test paper in advance by circling the important items that she needed to pay special attention to later. She also concluded from the items printed on the test sheet about what to expect and what to focus on, and then she took neat notes while doing the dictation. Most importantly, in the follow-up interview when asked about her ability to manage herself, she said,

I think being aware of any shift in my attention is the strategy I use most often because if I don't do so, I will be lost totally. So I remind myself to be aware of any shift in my attention and to redirect myself once I find I am not on the right track.

(From the second interview, April 7th. 2006)

As Natalie keeps reminding herself to pay attention and is aware of any shift in her attention, she is able to monitor or redirect herself to the right track. She also evaluated her performance in keeping the learning journal to share with me her

understanding of her accomplishment, her emotions and of her next goal or expectation toward herself.

It was clear that she knew and was willing to take on the responsibility of learning by planning, monitoring, and evaluating herself.

(C) Natalie's Attitude toward Herself

Natalie is very serious about her performance at school and two characteristics reveal her attitude toward herself. First, she has confidence in herself, but, also, she is strongly dependent on others.

It is very clear that Natalie has confidence in herself as a good learner. She believes that as long as she tries she will learn. The following dialogue may show her belief:

R: Do you believe you can learn well and easily if you are willing to learn?

N: Yes, I do.

R: You sound very confident! Is that because you think you can do so as long as you are willing to?

N: Yes (Smiling)!

(From the second interview April 7th, 2006)

However, although Natalie seems quite confident about her ability to learn, if she tries, the problem is that she does not always feel like trying. More than once in the interview she clearly expressed passive attitude toward learning: "I don't want to learn" or "It's not what I really like." In fact, Natalie assumes a passive role in her learning.

N: I am not active.

R: Do you think you are willing to accept the responsibility of learning?

N: No, I don't.

R: So you still hope that someone will be there to help you with your study, right?

N: Right! (From the second interview, April 7th, 2006)

She indeed depends on others to provide the drive to try hard. Her description about her personality also made it clear that she strongly depends on others.

R: How do you think about yourself, your personality?

N: Well, I'm short of patience and not too good at handling pressure, and I always need someone to push me to study.

(From the second interview, April 7th, 2006)

Her performance in learning also revealed the same characteristics. Firstly, I found her efforts in school-based language learning were not for herself but to please someone else. These people need to be the ones who can earn her trust and have important influence on her. Only three people had won her trust and could push her to keep working hard at English. They are her father, a native-speaker teacher from a cram school that she once attended, and me, her current teacher. Natalie strongly admires her father and feels the need to please him, although he is both a blessing and a source of pressure. Once in a meeting during the break, Natalie revealed her envy as well as her admiration for her father's ability at languages by saying, "My father is really awesome! He memorizes words from the English dictionary every day, and he even wrote his master's thesis in Latin when he was young. That's why my father always feels that I am not as good as him in English." So she tried very hard to be as good as her father in order to make him proud of her.

Natalie also revealed her admiration toward a native-speaker teacher from a cram school in the interview,

I trusted this teacher very much because she made herself understood without using any Chinese to teach me grammar. She did not even need to play many games to arise my interest. I was such a little girl at that time, and it was she that allowed me to learn English very happily.

(From the first interview)

Indeed, owing to the influence of this teacher, Natalie was convinced that a good

English teacher needed to use English all the time in teaching. She more than once asked me to use English all the time in teaching her class. When I explained to her that it would be hard for her classmates to understand me and that I needed to care about the rest of the students as well, she became very upset and angry. She cried out, “Why can’t you do that? My teacher in cram school could do that to make me understand her!” It is very clear that she always compared me with this teacher and hoped that I would be as good as her in my teaching.

Even though I, as her English teacher at school, could not meet her expectations as the native-speaker teacher in the cram school did, she also trusted me very much and shared aspects of her life with me both in the learning journal and in person. She spent lots of time in my office during the break and told me everything that had happened to her. We had a very close relationship and she even called me her ‘mother.’ She was so concerned about my impression about her that she tried very hard not to “let me down.”

R: Can you talk about something about your motivation for learning English? In addition to what you mentioned in your diary about the things that you read for me, is there any other motivation that pushes you to learn?

N: I don’t want to let you down and feel disappointed.

(From the second interview, April 7th, 2006)

Indeed, according to my observation, she really cared too much about my impression about her. She tried her best to do whatever I required or even went beyond my expectation because she was convinced that such an action would please me and thus that I would still be willing to help her in the learning process.

In sum, rather than treating learning as a way to improve herself, she treated it more like a way to make the people that are important to her happy. Pleasing these people sometimes seemed more important than learning itself. She strongly relied on

her significant others to offer her the drive to learn.

Interestingly, she also demonstrated strong resentment toward being pushed. This feeling often emerged in interviews: “I hate being pushed!”, “I am impatient.”, “I cannot handle pressure.” She revealed something about her attitude toward being pushed in the interview as follows:

R: Do you feel you are the kind of person who can easily learn a language?

N: No!

R: Why not?

N: Because I do not want to learn.

R: Why aren't you willing to learn? I read your diary, and you said you actually did not like to learn English! Why not?

N: Because I hate being pushed!

R: Oh! But in your first interview, I remembered that you said you needed someone to push you to read.

N: Yeah! But it is not what I really like!

R: But if there is no one to push you, will you still learn or make a long-term plan for yourself?

N: No!

R: Then what would you do?

N: I don't know! (From the second interview April 7th, 2006)

Her problem of being impatient to learn was also easily revealed when she reflected on her personality in the second interview:

R: You mean you will accept any material that the teacher gives you, including reading novels, magazines, outside readings, or any other material?

N: Yes, but only with a short period of patience.

R: You mean you can't do it regularly. Then what do you think about yourself, your personality?

N: Well, I'm short of patience and not too strong to handle the pressure, and I need someone to push me to study.

R: But will you accept everything that others order you to do?

N: Not in the beginning. I will say no first most of the time. But after that, I will think about their suggestions at home for two or three days. After I think about them thoroughly and clearly, I will accept them and do them well.

(From the second interview, April 7th, 2006)

All these statements, judged with other incidents as will be discussed below, suggested that she appreciated being pushed, but only if by people she trusted and if only the person made the suggestion in a tactful way. If not, she had great difficulty handling the pressure and would become very fragile.

Since she is so strongly under the influence of others, Natalie's learning indeed depends on the people whom she encounters. One of her motivations to learn comes from making the teachers whom she thinks are not good enough for her embarrassed.

R: Where do your goals come from? Are they from your teacher, or anyone else? What if you happened to have a teacher you did not like, what would you do then?

N: I will still keep the goal because I want to be better than him or her! I want to make the teacher embarrassed.

(From the second interview, April 7th. 2006)

If she found that the teacher she encountered could not fit her, she would be very aggressive and easily reveal a strong resentment when being pushed by this teacher.

The two following incidents may demonstrate this phenomenon.

The first one showed how she treated a substitute English teacher who happened to be someone she did not trust and whose teaching method she did not appreciate. She joined several other students in setting fire crackers in the classroom in the substitute teacher's presence to let him know they did not want to pay attention. Of course they annoyed the teacher a lot. Natalie, instead of feeling guilty, insisted that she was not doing anything really "harmful." She said, "You could not blame me for

that! It was because the intonation of the substitute teacher made it difficult for me to understand him. I did not want to listen to him at all. What's worse, his classroom management was too strict for me" (From the interview during class break, a day in August, 2006).

This event clearly revealed that Natalie was only willing to accept being pushed by the people she trusts. If not, she would make the teacher really embarrassed.

Still another event involved me and also influenced our relationship. One day as usual, when I was teaching some grammar and leading the class to do some practice, Natalie finished her worksheet early and proudly showed her work to me. I scanned her answer quickly and reminded her in front of the class to be more careful with some minor grammar errors. All of a sudden, Natalie pulled her face and stopped talking or having any eye contact with me. I knew that there must be something wrong but I could not figure it out at that time. After the class, everything changed, especially our relationship. Ignoring my explanation, Natalie angrily walked away. I tried very hard to figure out why she was so angry. Finally, I understood it was because that she was irritated by the way that I corrected her, especially in front of the class. I had not done it in a tactful way, at least, not in the way that she could accept. However, this event, which changed our relationship and mutual understanding, also evoked some great insights about her role in the learning process. Since she was very upset about me and regarded my reminders as a gesture of humiliation because I had hurt her self-esteem, she wrote in the diary and also on the MSN to her friends about her anger and discouragement. She said,

Why does she [the researcher] think that I should learn for her? Who does she think she is? Why do I learn for her? I want to learn just for myself, and not for her. And I believe that I can decide on my own about whether to learn or not. If I want to quit, I will quit. If I decide to learn, I will learn, but definitely not for her

again. I just want to know what she will feel if I quit learning English. Why do I have to learn just to please her? I just want to make her angry and to see what will happen next. I believe she can do nothing about this and she cannot do anything about me! I think she really broke my trust because she should know better than to correct me in front of others. She should know that it would break my trust and also my confidence in learning English! Besides, I can learn on my own, I can read the magazine and learn even more. You know, I pay attention to her in class just to please her, but actually, I can learn and study on my own.

(From MSN log, a day in early April, 2006)

After this event, Natalie stopped talking to me for two days. I was not aware that my correction would make her so angry. It was not until one of her friend's printed out the MSN log and showed it to me that I realized that she was so upset about this event. So I explained to her in the journal and also in person about my intention in correcting her. I explained to her that my act of correcting her was not to humiliate her in front of the class, but only to make sure that she would not make those kinds of mistakes again. I also expressed my happiness to hear that she had finally decided to learn and study for herself and not for me. I also honestly admitted that her attitude of treating me in such a cold way had really made me feel sad. After realizing how I felt, she replied on the diary that she thought the decision of quitting English and stop talking to me seemed meaningless. She said,

After reading what you wrote to me, I pondered on this event for a while. I realized that quitting English and ignoring you seem meaningless. After careful thinking, I have decided to study for myself. I will continue keeping a journal and doing the outside-reading. Even though these are burdens to me, they have helped me a lot. Your expectations of me are the greatest burden and pressure for me. I always think that I haven't reached your expectation; yet I tried as hard as possible so much to meet your expectation. I don't want to let you down, even though I know there is still a long way to go for me to reach your expectation. Therefore I need some more time and I need someone to help me, to push me, and to direct my study. If there is someone to direct me and supervise me, I will

be given the power and motivation to study. No question, I believe you are the one I need.

This time I was about to ignore you as I had planned; however, I found I could not do this. Losing someone to count on is what I cannot stand. I cannot face my life if I do not have someone to share the secrets in my mind. It is rather funny that I was mad about you about this. Today I told my homeroom teacher about this, and she also felt that I had been very childish. I hope that you will care more about my feelings and personality. After all, you are the one who knows me the most. I do not want anything like this happen to us again.

(From the learning journal, a day in early April, 2006)

I concluded from the interviews as well as from the way she treated me that she preferred to rely on someone more like a mentor or a facilitator to guide her or to give her some pressure to study, which was what I usually do. What was more important, these mentors need to guide her in a tactful way so that she can accept their guidance. Otherwise, she would lose patience in learning. What's worse, she would fight back or simply fool around doing something meaningless because she did not even know what to do, as she had said in the first interview.

Fortunately for Natalie, English learning is not always related to pleasing others. There were times when her efforts to learn English were related to keeping in contact with her close friend Ellisa, a friend who was good at English after immigrating to the USA when Natalie was in third grade.

In order to maintain a friendship with Ellisa, Natalie learned English with great dedication. Her motivation came actively from a strong drive to help Ellisa to learn Chinese. She said,

I enjoy writing to Ellisa on the net. Since she wants to learn Chinese and I want to help her, I have to learn English well first so that I can communicate with her and teach her Chinese.

(From the first interview, December 12th, 2005)

She kept in contact with Ellsa regularly and trained herself to write in English when keeping a learning journal, travel diary or even talking on MSN with her Taiwanese friends.

She also tried diverse techniques to improve her English, including watching CNN, listening to one of the English educational programs like “A+”, reading novels, story books, and three kinds of English magazines including “A+”, “4U”, and “Studio Classroom”. Actually, few students read as many magazines at the same time as Natalie did. The way she studied so many English magazines at the same time revealed her intention to have a good command of English. She also listened to ICRT, one of the famous English learning radio stations in Taiwan, on my recommendation. One day in June, she happily told me that her experience of listening to ICRT was quite successful because she could understand 60% of the content, especially the weather forecast.

In conclusion, an issue clearly emerged from this study case: social interaction plays an important role in Natalie’s EFL learning efforts. Through social interaction between her family, her friends in school as well as in the USA, and a teacher who she trusts, Natalie learns English with enthusiasm. Her family background provides her with the best lifestyle, education and all kinds of cross-cultural accesses. As a student with a high ability in self-management, she is confident of herself. Nevertheless, she still inclines to rely on someone she trusts to regulate her learning and push her forward. She strongly depends on others: her father, her teachers, and a friend far away. She relies on these people to push her to study since she herself is both “unwilling to learn” and “impatient.” If her relationship with these people is smooth and if these people could guide her in a tactful way, she would be more than willing to learn and learn well in order to please these people and make herself happy,

which process would improve this social interaction in a reciprocal. Without this positive social interaction, Natalie would simply drop out due to the difficulty in handling the pressure and only assume a passive role in learning. Fortunately, having always her father, her teacher and her friend to push her to learn, Natalie's performance at school is always among the top 5 % of the class, giving her a sense of strong self-regulation.

4.1.2 Jasmine

A) Jasmine's Family Background

Even though Jasmine did not have as many opportunities to travel around as Natalie did, Jasmine's background and family education, particularly which she received from her mother, had influenced her a lot in her attitude toward learning. Her mother happens to be a well-known English teacher from the Taipei First Girls' Senior High School, one of the best senior high schools in Taiwan. Her mother is famous for having written many grammar books and created many handouts for senior high school students to use as reference resources. In spite of being a very famous English teacher in a prestigious school, Jasmine's mother had stopped teaching her English personally ever since Jasmine had started junior high school. Her mother's educational philosophy made Jasmine different from Natalie and some other peers: Jasmine had already been trained to be an independent thinker. In the interview, she described her mother's influence on her in this way:

R: Why do you think you should be responsible for your learning?

J: Well, it's because ever since I was a little girl, my mother always made me study on my own without giving me any help or controlling me.

R: Really, how did she train you?

J: I hated asking my mother any questions because she would never answer me directly. Ever since I was a child, she has used this way to teach me so that I

could think further. If I asked her one question, she would ask me 10 more questions in return instead of answering me immediately. She even criticized the way I raise questions. Sometimes she thought my questions were too stupid. Sometimes she told me I should ask the question in another way, which made me really upset. Later on, I learnt not to ask her questions or at least not to expect a direct answer.

R: Do you think this kind of training has influenced you a lot?

J: Yes, at least I am more independent than my brother. My mother trains my brother and me differently because she is more worried about my brother. She always asks him to hand his homework to her to let her check it first. She regulates his learning in every way she can. But she doesn't treat me the same way.

R: Why doesn't she treat you the same way?

J: Well, I guess it's because I am older than my brother, and I have been more independent since I was a child.

(From the second interview, May 17th, 2006)

When Jasmine had questions to ask her mother, her mother would counter with even more questions to train her thinking skills instead of giving Jasmine instruction directly, and refused to give her an immediate answer so that Jasmine could think further before arriving at a conclusion. The provision of this kind of scaffolding trained Jasmine to be independent and she knew that help from the adult surrogates would come only after she had thought about the questions thoroughly. As a result, Jasmine was not as dependent on the relationship between her and her adult surrogates as Natalie. She had been trained to be independent.

B) Jasmine's Performance at School

Jasmine's learning background and her English achievement are different from those of Natalie. Her score is ranked as the top 8th of her class (see Table 4.1.2).

Table 4.1.2
Summary of Jasmine's Performance

Rank	Student	Listening Test Average	Sample GEPT LT (Total Score 120)	Monthly Test Average
8 th	Jasmine	83.16	92	93
Mean of the whole class		55.54	77.411	72.662
Summary	1. The top 8th of her class.			
	2. A more skilled listener.			
	3. An independent learner holding positive attitude toward learning.			
	4. Has high motivation to learn to enjoy the process of learning.			

Her performance, although not as good as Natalie's, is still above the average. As a teacher, I see Jasmine as a learner who has confidence and strong motivation as well as good listening strategies. Perhaps because she is independent, she learns English with confidence and takes on the responsibility to learn willingly. Her strong motivation drives her to pursue whatever she is interested in. As she always holds a positive attitude to learning English, especially toward the listening strategies, Jasmine actively pushes herself in the process of learning not so much to please her significant others as Natalie does, but more to enjoy the process of learning, which gives her greater happiness and which drives her to learn even further.

Her record of her use of listening strategies in the questionnaire and the interview also indicated that she already had the abilities as a good language learner. She attended to the meaning but not to the form. She used background knowledge to offer herself extra context in order to make herself grasp the meaning. Based upon this context, she then used a 'guessing' strategy to figure out the content. For example, when I trained the students to practice 'guessing' through watching some funny advertisements in English, I found that she already had the ability to focus on the context offered by the advertisement and quickly answered my questions correctly. In the follow-up interview, she described her use of strategies this way:

I usually attend to the meaning first and details later. When the advertisement

was played, I focused on the picture itself, which was a great help for me to understand the whole content. I would not pay attention to the unknown words unless I am required to place special attention on them. At this time, I will note down the details in my notebook and try to use a ‘guessing’ strategy to get the meaning. My tips are to observe the picture or the background and employ my background knowledge to make a wise guess.

(From the second interview)

Jasmine’s independence, the ability to employ good listening strategies and her confidence in learning, as well as a positive attitude toward learning put her performance at school above the average, if not among the top 15% of her class.

C) Jasmine’s Attitude toward Learning and toward Herself

Generally speaking, Jasmine assumes an active role in her learning process. In the first interview, Jasmine said,

I think learning shouldn’t be other people’s responsibility. You can’t totally count on or lean on others. Instead, learning should be one’s own responsibility in which you might need someone to help you but eventually you still need to learn for yourself and on your own.

(From the first interview, January 17th, 2005)

Jasmine was different from Natalie in that she realized that the true task of learning may not depend on an adult surrogate but on herself as a learner. This kind of attitude may be related to her mother’s educational philosophy. Jasmine once mentioned the reasons why her mother stopped teaching her personally. She said,

Maybe my mother did not want to be angry with me because she sometimes thinks the questions I ask are too stupid, and also because I have proved my ability to learn and to study on my own. My mother has confidence in my ability to be independent.

(From the first interview, January 17th, 2005)

To sum up, Jasmine was convinced that she should assume an active role in the process of learning and that she should be responsible for her own learning.

She expressed her willingness to take responsibility for her learning by employing different actions to improve her English. First, she makes good use of every chance to use English. For example, Jasmine uses English to communicate with her mother sometimes at home. Under these circumstances, Jasmine trains her fluency in speaking and her competence in listening. While speaking, although not exactly native-like, she has the ability to use different ways to express herself. Jasmine also seizes other opportunities to practice English. She enjoys the process of learning itself and approaches the learning tasks with positive actions. To begin with, she starts her learning from what interests her. She introduced her ways of learning English as follows:

R: How do you usually train yourself to learn English?

J: Well, I like English movies and English songs. I read lots of English storybooks, especially the storybooks that have been adapted into movies. Actually, I love any novels that are related to movies. I have read *The Autobiography of David Bakerhem*, *The Vampire*, *The Mummy* and *The Pirate of the Caribbean Sea*. In addition, I listen to English pop music or even some old folk songs. I like to search the websites to find the top 40s on the billboard and download from MTV to help me learn English songs. I often pay special attention to the lyrics. And I have subscribed to an e-newspaper on the net, which has information about the latest music and gives me a free try listening to the music on the net. I would listen to the songs and go and buy them if I like them.

R: So you have acquired some reading ability in this process, right?

A: Right.

(From the first interview, January 17th, 2005)

The ways she tried to improve her listening and reading skills also suggested that she always took an active role in learning. We had a dialogue as follows:

R: Do you do something to train your listening?

J: Well, since my mother doesn't allow me to watch Chinese movies, I watch many English movies. I listen to what the actors are saying while looking at the image and Chinese subtitles. So I guess that makes my listening skill good.

R: Then how about not looking at the subtitles?

J: I have tried it. For example, I bought some DVDs I like and turned on the subtitles in English to train myself to listen to English with English subtitles. But I think the English subtitles are really too fast for me to read, so I can only listen.

R: Wow! Did you think yourself of all these methods, or did some other people tell you about them?

A: Well, I think it's because I was bored so I had to think about something to do! (Laughs). Moreover, my tutor, who is my mother's intern student at school, also trains me to read English novels and to use English as much as possible.

R: Really, how does your tutor train you?

A: Well, she is just like my mother. She also requires me to be very independent. For example, she always brings an English-English dictionary with her so that anytime when I ask her any unknown words, she, instead of answering me immediately or directly, insists that I should look up the word in the dictionary. Sometimes we even have a competition to see who is the fastest at finding the words. She also asks me to tell her how to use the word in a sentence after I have looked it up. Later on, she gives me some other information about how to use the word, but I think the crucial point is that it should be my responsibility to find the solution first and to explain it to her.

R: Are you influenced by your tutor a lot?

J: Yes, I am.

R: What do you think about her teaching?

J: I think it's very useful to me. Because I always have to explain to her how to use the word, I think I gain more of an impression of the new word and I can use it more naturally.

(From the first interview, January 17th, 2005)

The incident above indicated that both Jasmine herself and her tutor play important roles in her learning process. Even though Jasmine is independent enough, she is still under the great influence of her tutor. Her tutor's teaching philosophy, just like that of Jasmine's mother's, makes Jasmine believe that it is she herself who should take on the responsibility of her own learning. Jasmine clearly revealed her admiration toward her tutor while she was mentioning her problems with reading and her tutor's resolution to her problem. As one of Jasmine's significant others knowledgeable enough to know how to scaffold the help for her, her tutor is definitely crucial in her learning process. The following dialogue shows how her tutor assisted her by providing scaffolding:

J: Well, I am not used to reading especially when I encounter problems with spelling, word formation and the rules of pronunciation. They are quite frightening for me. For example, even though the word is just created by putting some easy letters together and is made into a new word, I found it quite hard for me to decipher. This makes me feel frustrated, which bothers me a lot and I will be too lazy to read the materials because I have suffered too much in the process of reading and deciphering the unknown words.

R: But when you are listening, you are also listening to a series of words and they may also form a new word, how can you understand the material?

J: Well, I can understand it through listening because I know the pronunciation of each word. But if you put them together and ask me to read a word out by just looking at it, I would tell you that this is something that I can not do.

R: Then what does your tutor do to deal with your reading problems?

J: I like the method my tutor asks me to use. She requires me to read a part of an article first on my own, and she reads the whole story out loud for me later. She also asks me how much I can understand; after that, she explains all the content in English for me. In this way, I can improve my listening. At first, my tutor asks me to read quietly on my own, she won't recite the story for me. In the meantime, she also wants me to underline any words I don't know while reading. After that, she knows I have already learned how to pronounce the

word and already known the meaning of some words from listening to her recitation, and she then asks me to erase the marks under those words which I have understood from the listening. In the end, I find that the words left are those I really don't understand even from listening, and that's the time for me to look them up in the dictionary. I usually use this method to deal with my reading problems.

(From the second interview, May 17th, 2006)

The interview showed that her tutor knew not only when to provide scaffolding for Jasmine's learning, but also when to withdraw her help once she found that Jasmine had already internalized the tips. In this way, Jasmine is able to develop from other-regulation to self-regulation.

Jasmine gradually gained confidence in her ability as an independent language learner under the influence of her tutor. She said,

I used to be someone who couldn't tolerate the unknown before meeting my tutor. I used to ask for help immediately when I encountered any problems in reading. Otherwise, I would feel frustrated by the reading and became uneasy with the material.

(From the first interview)

Before knowing her tutor, she tended to drop reading anytime she encountered reading problems or hid away from it if she could not get any immediate answers. Jasmine used to need to count on other people to read out the whole story for her in order to make her understand the material through listening. However, since 7th grade when she met her tutor, she started to change. Jasmine gradually adopted the habit to learn on her own due to her tutor's influence. She said "I have confidence that I can be a good learner after staying with my tutor for a period of time" (from the first interview). After having internalized the methods her tutor taught her, she could approach the task strategically. Jasmine was then on her way to self-regulation by internalizing the appropriate ways of learning through her tutor's help.

Apart from being confident in herself as an independent learner, Jasmine also knows under what conditions she could learn better and thus makes good use of these conditions to improve herself. She said,

I still have to learn how to control myself from the temptation of watching TV all the time. I can only really become a good learner under this condition because most of the time, I find myself fooling around by watching TV.

(From the first interview)

This interview suggested that Jasmine had acquired the ability to evaluate her learning process in that she could decide for herself when or how she could learn best, even though her indulgence in watching TV might not be so much a waste of time as she herself had described. According to what she mentioned in the follow-up interview and my long term observation, she still learned a lot from watching TV, especially programs from the U.S. that are suitable for young kids. In addition, she always watched them without looking at the subtitles. From the way she described her learning, it was clear that she had developed not only confidence in her learning but also an ability to monitor herself in that she could tell when or how she could learn better.

In addition, Jasmine showed a strong intention to learn English. One day in late April, twelve British teachers representing the English School Council visited our school. The principal asked for twelve students to serve as the student ambassadors to show the foreign teachers around and to chat with them. Jasmine bravely volunteered to take the job. She seized this rare chance out of her strong motivation to improve her English, regardless of the fact that her classmates refused to show their support. They thought that she was not good enough to be a student ambassador. Although she was a little bit discouraged and felt frustrated, she still took the chance with her head high in order to prove that she had the ability to do the job well like the other students. When

asked about her intention in undertaking this challenge, she said, “I was convinced that I could do it; besides, I thought it would be very challenging and fun, so I took the chance” (From the second interview).

This event turned out to inspire her a lot because she found it hard to utter even a word when the British teachers attempted to talk to her. She described her frustration this way:

I was so frightened that I could say nothing but stuttered like a child especially when I found the other students were so fluent in speaking and listening. However, I did not give up no matter how frustrated I was. Instead, I told myself to put more effort in learning English. That’s how I dealt with the discouragement. I am the kind of person that can easily let go the unhappiness and forget it. No matter how sad I am, I find strength to carry on the next day. I will not let my emotions control me too much.

(From the second interview)

In this event, Jasmine’s confidence in being a learner was easily recognized; furthermore, the affective component in her attitudes also displayed positive attributes. She seldom allowed her emotions hinder or impede her learning; instead, she controlled her emotions by regulating them so as not to let them influence her learning.

In conclusion, although Jasmine was not as dependent on others as Natalie, she was indeed influenced by her mother and her tutor. They helped her develop a positive attitude to learn as well as effective strategies to use in approaching English. Jasmine learned to be responsible for herself through the social interaction with these important adults. Her strong motivation, combined with the instruction and the effective strategies she learned from her mother and her tutor, made her learning process a positive and successful one in which she found great pleasure and confidence.

4.1.3 Tom

A) Tom's Family Background

Tom, like Natalie and Jasmine, is also under great influence from his parents. His father is a retired soldier, and his mother used to be a teacher. They influence Tom in different ways. From his father, Tom inherited the characteristics of a good soldier: being obedient and highly self-regulated. The way Tom carries himself and the way he treats people around him clearly reveal the effect of his father's military influence on him. Tom is considered a polite student who behaves so well that he over-regulates himself and becomes too responsible, judging from many teachers' impression of him, including his homeroom teacher, his physical teacher and his English teacher. In fact, he behaves like a smart soldier who always follows the rules and sees to it that he can be perfect in everything he does. However, he also appears to be very conservative and a little reclusive. He performs like a perfectionist. He is so disciplined that he prefers to stay silent in class. Most of the time, he is an attentive listener and does not ask many questions or actively seek opportunities to speak in English. This kind of attitude is usually regarded as acceptable manners in the social context of the Taiwanese classroom. Thus, he is usually considered a good student according to the conventional notion.

What makes Tom really different from the other students in my class is the way he interacts with his teachers and himself. He does not show any evidence of emotional or behavioral conflicts such as many other teenagers do, he just follows whatever the teachers say and always shows respect to his elders. In fact, his respect toward his teachers has won him the reputation of being a "brilliant and mature" student, amongst many of his teachers.

In addition to respecting his elders, he also pushes himself hard to meet his high

expectations of himself. He can hardly allow himself to make any mistakes in anything he does owing to his strong ability in self-regulation. Unlike other students, he does well in almost every subject without going to a cram school. He is the only one in his class who never goes to a cram school and still manages to achieve a top score on almost every test. This suggests a remarkable ability to manage his studies. No wonder he has never done anything that can be considered inappropriate in class.

One event helped to explain the strong ability he possesses in self-regulation which makes him very different from the other teenagers. There was a time when I took seven days off because of sickness. A substitute teacher who happened to be sterner and stricter than me took over my teaching. Most students in Tom's class were very uneasy and they planned to show their unhappiness and resentment by playing a trick on the substitute teacher. Some students, including Natalie, set a firecracker off five minutes before the end of a class to scare the teacher. Tom, being different from most of his classmates, had a different attitude. Instead of joining his classmates, Tom still studied very hard and respected the substitute teacher as always. Although Tom had nothing to do with this event, he wrote in the learning journal afterwards,

I felt terribly sorry for what happened. I thought what we [the class] did was unforgivable. We students are supposed to behave in a good manner no matter what kind of teacher we have, aren't we? But I failed to influence other people into thinking in the same way as I did; therefore, I felt very guilty because I should have led the class to the right behavior, but I didn't. I should be the one to blame and I should be responsible for this event.

(From the learning journal, a day in May, 2005)

What really surprised me was that Tom, who had nothing to do with this event, thought that he should be the one to blame because of his failure to influence the class. The way Tom reacted to this event suggests his strong sense of responsibility and his

ability in self-monitoring, which are very likely due to his father's influence. Despite that all the teachers knew that he should be the last person to blame, he still blamed himself so much that he even went to me personally to apologize for his classmates. I kept telling him that it was not his fault; however, I could not really convince him. It seemed to me that Tom over-disciplined himself. Even in this event, he still managed to control his emotion and to stay concentrated when all the other students were misbehaving and negative toward the substitute teacher. I asked him in the second interview about the reason why he could manage to control his emotions. He said,

I will never allow myself to be controlled by the environment or my own emotions. I am not the kind of person who easily gives up. I will try very hard before I give in. If I allow myself to be influenced by the environment, it should only be in a right or a positive way. For example, in my class, there are so many students whose English are better than mine. Instead of feeling frustrated or upset, I choose to think in a positive way. I think that they inspire me because they give me the strength to compete with them and to carry on.

(From the second interview, August 8th, 2006)

Indeed, he seldom allows himself to be directly subject to stimulation from the environment. In other words, it is he himself, not the environment, who controls his learning.

From his mother, Tom learnt how to approach the task of learning English. Since Tom's English is not as good as he expects (see Table 4.1.3); he relies on his mother when he has problems with English. His mother requires him to memorize the words and the sentences in a vocabulary book in order to expand his vocabulary. Tom said, "My mother will check once in a while to see if I have really memorized them. She requires me to memorize not only the words, but also the sentences so that I will know how and when to use these words" (from the first interview). Therefore, for Tom, the way to improve his English is to memorize as many words as possible

because that is what his mother wants him to do. As a result, He tends to attribute his failure in learning English to his inability to memorize or to know enough vocabulary.

He said in the first interview:

I think my English is not good because I didn't know enough vocabulary. When I read, I find there are too many words that I don't understand. As a result, I think I need to memorize as many words as possible.

(From the first interview, December 15th, 2005)

Therefore, the family education Tom receives from his parents influences him a lot not only in his attitude toward himself and others but also toward the strategies he employs to improve his English.

B) Tom's Performance at School

Unlike Jasmine or Natalie, Tom is one of those brilliant students that can keep a good academic record in every subject except English. His performance on other subjects is usually at the top of the class (the first place). However, his performance pushes him down to the 15th in his English class (see Table 4.1.3). Although he still manages to be above the average, his performance in English is comparatively much less able than that in his other subjects, which upsets Tom himself a lot.

Table 4.1.3
Summary of Tom's Performance

Rank	Student	Listening Test Average	Sample GEPT LT (Total Score 120)	Monthly Test Average
15th	Tom	55	80	96
Mean of the whole class		55.54	77.411	72.662
Summary	1. 1. The top in other subjects, yet, the 15th in English.			
	2. Even with resolution to learn, he lacks flexible English learning strategies. He treats English as a formula, like math.			

As a highly self-regulated student, he cannot tolerate this kind of performance, which he considers a failure. Therefore, he learns English with a sense of competition

in order to beat other classmates and conquer his failure. He said,

I have a strong sense of competition. I learn English because I want to compete with other talented students in my class. I want to be as good as them. If I can't be as good as them, I will be angry with myself and I will tell myself to work harder so that I could keep up with them.

(From the second interview, August 8th, 2006)

As his teacher, I think of him as a student with determined resolution to learn, but he lacks flexible strategies to use in learning English. As discussed earlier, he is deeply influenced by his mother in terms of learning strategies and all he knows about learning English is that it is necessary to expand his vocabulary. He thinks it is the only key to improving his English. He rarely has chances to learn other useful strategies. Those effective or appropriate strategies that work for some other learners do not exist in his repertoire.

He said in the interview, "I tried many ways to improve English; however, they did not happen to be suitable for me. Therefore, I am desperate to find other ways" (from the first interview, December 15th, 2005). But when I further asked him about the strategies he had tried, he could not name any other except memorizing words. He may not really understand the strategies he claimed to use, or does not use the strategies actively and flexibly according to the particular learning context that he is in. He once told me in the interview,

I think "strategies" are only "short cuts" to learning English, which made me think that they are not really good for me or that I am not supposed to learn them. I am convinced that I need to learn English step by step and study it hard without taking any short cuts.

(From the first interview)

This interview revealed that Tom's knowledge about language learning strategies was limited or inappropriate. He sometimes uses inappropriate strategies to cope with

problems in learning English. He often tries to solve his problems with English in the same way as he deals with math or physics problems, which are two of his best subjects. He tends to treat English sentences as puzzles, in which he treats English letters as the codes in a formula and he interprets them in the same way. No wonder he often has problems understanding English sentences; after all, language is not like math or physics and can not be deciphered in the same way. The type of the strategy that he uses, i.e., memorizing vocabulary, can only be considered a “bottom-up” strategy which is believed to be employed by less skilled listeners (Vandergrift, 2003), rather than “top-down” strategies employed by more skilled listeners. In fact, Tom also resorts to “direct translation” so often that it impedes him from developing conceptual understanding and from efficiently constructing meaning. His learning journal, which he tries very hard to keep in English, clearly reveals his habit of employing superficial direct translation in writing. His sentences, which were composed word by word according to their meanings in Chinese, are hard to understand because they were actually expressed according to Chinese syntax rather than English syntax. Tom is so much influenced by direct translation that he focuses on details and forms rather than on the gist or the meaning, which makes him a less skilled listener.

In terms of his listening strategies, several problems can be found. First, taking a close look at his habit of listening to the English radio program on CD, which accompanies the A+ magazine, it can be found that he does not listen to the English explanation given by the native speaker in the broadcast as suggested by the magazine. In fact, he just opens the magazine and listens to the CD-Rom in which only the “text recitation” was played to let him know how to pronounce each word. He does not seek to know the meaning of the content by listening to the “text explanation” in

English or in Chinese. Instead, he prefers to read the magazine only and figure out the meaning by using a dictionary. What's worse, he only listens to the program once a week, not each day for half an hour as the magazine suggested. He accumulates all the materials for a week and listens only to the text recitation part all at once in half an hour. He does not try to figure out the content of the material through the process of listening; instead, he only resorts to understanding the pronunciation of each word. He complains that he can not gain much from listening to English programs and it is not difficult to understand why.

Three more reasons can be given to explain his lack of achievement in the process of listening. First, he does not realize that the way he perceives as effective is not really the most efficient way. For example, when I asked him to evaluate his own use of listening strategies, he said, "I should have listened to the program after I really understood what the content is about," showing that he believed in some concepts that were not necessarily important in the process of listening. After all, it's not a necessary condition to understand the whole content before starting to listen an English program. Instead, people can try to figure out the content through the process of listening to the program as suggested by the program. However, Tom does not catch this point. Yet after some clarification from me, he said,

I should at least try to use a "guessing" strategy to understand the content while listening to the program. In this way, I will not have to look at the magazine while listening if I already understand the content.

(From the second interview)

This comment revealed that he usually looks at the magazine while listening and occupies himself too much in the reading process instead of listening. That is the second reason why he cannot get much from listening. In addition, he admits that he does not make time to practice his listening at all. That is the third reason why Tom

cannot improve his listening.

C) Tom's Attitude toward Himself and Learning

Tom has the potential to play an active role in the processes of learning owing to his strong sense of responsibility and competitive spirit. He is willing to learn strategies that could improve his English after being convinced that strategies are not really "short cuts" or "something not supposed to learn", but some tips for him to learn more effectively.

His willingness to learn could be revealed in several ways. First, according to my long-term observation and the impression of his other teachers, Tom concentrated fully in each class. I saw him keep full concentration on the required activities, such as filling in the worksheet carefully and taking notes regularly regardless of the noise made by his other classmates. He turned in the homework on time and managed his schedule so well that he could cope with the regular tests easily. Tom still took all the learning material with a positive attitude and he never failed to complete assignments before class even when his peers complained about having too many worksheets to complete. Tom requires himself to be a good student who knows how to behave reasonably and responsibly in his own study.

Nevertheless, Tom is still not confident enough in English to take on the whole responsibility of learning. He said, "I am not so good at English, especially when comparing myself with those classmates who are really talented in English" (from the first interview). Therefore, he only dares to follow what other people tell him to do when it comes to English learning. Tom's role in the process of learning is mostly to follow tasks set by teachers or others; he seldom challenges the regular classroom activities or tries something new or different to improve his English proficiency. In

fact, he is a little bit passive since he is always waiting for instruction from others. If there is no one showing him how to learn English more effectively, Tom then resorts to a more traditional way of approaching English and confines himself in his role as a diligent student, rather than employing strategies to improve his English out of his own volition. It is not because he does not want to learn more effectively, but because he just enforces what other people have informed him to do without a holistic view about when or how or even why to employ these strategies.

His lack of confidence in English may be explained in several ways. First, he seldom practices English. According to my observation, he prefers to stay silent and to be an attentive listener, waiting for instructions only. If there are no instructions, there is no action. He never actively uses English to communicate with others. He seldom practices his speaking ability, which he claims to be his best among the four skills, let alone to practice his skills in listening, writing and reading. Second, he does not attempt to meet the description he set for a good learner. In his definition, a good learner should possess several characteristics as follows:

I think a good learner should not only understand how to use a word correctly in the sentence, but also review all the words regularly. Besides, a good learner should preview work and find some supplementary materials to enrich his knowledge. The most attribute for a good learner is to be autonomous.

(From the first interview, December 15th, 2005)

According to his own report, he did not review what he had learned in the English class regularly; neither did he study English unless the exam was approaching. He “only seeks to comprehend the words and does not review.” He said, “I am not a good learner at English because I am not autonomous enough. I rely on my mother to give me the pressure when it comes to studying English” (from the first interview). Even if Tom regularly memorizes the words to meet his mother’s expectation, the

way he studies is still passive. He said, “If my mother is not going to check my progress, then I won’t study very hard” (from the first interview). It appears that while Tom is an autonomous learner in other subjects, he is not in English.

Owing to his lack of confidence in himself, Tom underestimates his ability to be a good learner. He always pushes himself too hard both emotionally and physically. Emotionally, he tends to think that he is not good enough at English and appears to be unconfident, regardless of the fact that his teachers keep reminding him that his English proficiency is not really as bad as he describes. For the researcher, as one of his teachers, he still manages to get good grades in English on the regular tests. I think his ability to gain more control over his behavior and emotions is the factor that can compensate for his less skilled ability in employing strategies and that this control can enable him to be a good learner. Yet, my encouragement did not seem helpful in making him confident in his English ability. Physically, he also requires himself to be always energetic in class regardless of the condition of his health. There were several times when Tom was sick; however, no matter how tired he looked, he never allowed himself to take a rest in class. Without showing any sign of dozing off, he insisted on finishing all the required tasks carefully and stuck to the task until the very end of the class. All of the above points are likely to be a result of his father’s military influence. Contrary to most teenagers, Tom seems to over-control himself. He needs to be guided not to treat himself too strictly but to be more open-minded so that he could be more confident in himself.

Therefore, the problem for Tom is not about being unwilling to take responsibility, but about not having appropriate methods to deal with English learning. These appropriate methods include not only the use of effective strategies to learn better, but also the encouragement from his significant others that could encourage

him to be more positive emotionally.

Tom's interaction with Natalie, his good friend who provides a lot of enlightenment to him in how to approach English, could show that Tom counts too much on his significant others to give him the drive to study English. In the process of this study, Tom made a deal with Natalie. They decided to compete with each other when keeping the English learning journal to see who could write a large number of pages in the journal. Tom put lots of efforts to try for about two months and indeed showed some gradual improvement in his writing skill. The fact that it was not Tom but Natalie that initiated this competition suggests that Tom was indeed relatively more passive in learning English compared with Natalie. However, two months after they started this task, they had an argument and Tom stopped keeping the learning journal and stopped talking to Natalie.

It seemed that Tom stopped making attempts to use English without the people who could guide him. Tom's mother and Natalie are obviously his significant others, who pushed him to study English in their own ways: while Tom's mother pushed him to memorize as much vocabulary as possible, Natalie pushed him to use English often in speaking and writing. They both played vital roles in Tom's learning process. It is apparent that Tom, like Natalie and Jasmine, still needs to be guided by people who are more knowledgeable and who can approach the task more effectively. Tom gained the methods to learn and the drives to learn through the social interaction with these more knowledgeable guides,. Therefore, having a good social interaction with such people is especially helpful for Tom.

In conclusion, Tom is a student who pushes himself both emotionally and behaviorally to take the responsibility to learn and to take actions to improve himself in English. However, Tom is not confident enough in English, and so is a little bit

passive in waiting for instructions from his significant others not only because he wants to show his obedience to them, but also because he lacks strategies that enable him to take action to improve his learning. The social interaction between Tom and his significant others is important not only because he gained his strict attitude to learning through these significant others, but also because he needs to be guided by them to find suitable strategies to help him deal with English more efficiently. Apparently, if his adult surrogates can guide him within his ZPD to perform the tasks more strategically, he will become more experienced in the process of gaining control over the language and switch from passive “other-regulation” to active “self-regulation.” His significant others need to be both a knowledgeable resource and a counselor for him. They need to provide him with a variety of strategies, not just play the role of a regulator, as his mother or a companion, as Natalie do. Since Tom always pushes and regulates himself too hard, the tasks of his significant others are not only to enlighten Tom as to the use of more efficient strategies to reach his goal, but also to encourage Tom to hold a positive attitude toward his ability and to be more confident in himself. It is hoped that Tom can be more autonomous in becoming more resourceful and confident in English instead of passively waiting for other people’s guidance.

4.1.4 Jin Pin

A) Jin Pin’s Family Background

Jin Pin’s family background makes her different from Natalie, Jasmine, and Tom in many ways. First, Jin Pin’s parents cannot personally educate her in how to learn English more strategically because they do not know any English. Jin Pin’s Parents are not able to direct her or educate her in any English learning strategies. They

simply sent her to Ko Jian, an English cram school, to receive instructions. Therefore, Jin Pin does not have as much knowledge of how to approach English compared to the other three students. The only education she receives comes from school teachers or the experience she learned in cram school, which she only attended for two years and then dropped because she failed to pass the test to move on to next stage.

Moreover, Jin Pin's parents do not have as much time to help her study as the parents of the other three students do. Jin Pin's parents are too occupied in making a living most of the time to supervise her learning. Therefore, they can only judge Jin Pin's English performance by her scores on tests. Of course, while they require her to have better scores, they do not know how to assist her when she has problems in English. Neither do they know where her problems in English are. In addition, they hold a democratic attitude toward her education. They give her more freedom to do what she wants and to be herself without intervening in her study too much compared to her peers' parents. Jin Pin is usually on her own when it comes to studying. Since she is a "passive student" according to herself (from the first interview), she spends less time studying and is less motivated in learning. Her mother only gives her pressure to study when she finds Jin Pin fooling around, which is what Jin Pin usually does. Her father, by comparison, never intervenes. He is seldom concerned about her study. Actually, Jin Pin seldom mentions about her father. It is her mother who cares most of the time. However, the pressure from her mother does not seem to have a positive effect on her. Jin Pin said in the interview,

My mother's way of pushing me just makes me feel that I am really the kind of lazy and passive person that she describes. She always says, "See! You are lazy again! What are you doing now? Stop watching TV and go to do your homework!" I tend to believe that I am really as hopeless as she thinks.

(From the second interview, August 4th, 2006)

As Jin Pin is usually left by herself without having a more knowledgeable guide to help her study, she drops out quickly when she feels frustrated. Her family background influences her a lot in that her parents can not offer her an environment in which she can find access to immediate help. She is less active and less confident in English as a consequence.

B) Jin Pin's Performance at School

Jin Pin's performance at school is not as good as that of the other three students. Her English academic report puts her 31st in her class (see Table 4.1.4).

Table 4.1.4
Summary of Jin Pin's Performance

Rank	Student	Listening Test Average	Sample GEPT LT (Total Score 120)	Monthly Test Average
31st	Jin Pin	52.5	36	59.5
Mean of the whole class		55.54	77.411	72.662
Summary		1. The 31st in her class.		
		2. A less skilled listener.		
		3. Passive to take action to learn. Unconfident of herself and her social relationships.		

Her passive characteristics can be identified in three aspects. First, she is not as optimistic as the other three cases. Judging from her daily performance in class, she is unconfident and shrinking in her learning attitude and her social relationships. As she is unconfident in herself, she appears to be less active in taking actions to improve herself. She is too shy and sometimes too passive to ask for help from the teacher. She is introverted and seldom fully expresses herself in class. When she walks, she stares at the floor with her head down and her hair covering her face. When she talks, she tilts her head instead of looking straight at the people talking to her. She is waiting for other people's instruction most of the time when it comes to learning English. It is partially because she is less developed than her peers and she does not know how to

react to a situation, and partially because she is “passive in everything” so that she “does not find anything interesting to her” (from the first interview, January 16th, 2006). Her passivity affects her learning in negative way since she keeps mentioning the idea of “jumping from the fifth floor”. She wants to do so only because she “finds everything uninteresting and hopes to feel the pleasure of flying by doing this” (from the first interview, January 16th, 2006).

Her lack of confidence can be revealed in many ways, especially in her learning, the condition of her health as well as her social relationships with others. She is unconfident in learning because she can not learn successfully on her own. The conditions to make her confident of herself are that she “needs to be deprived of the TV and computers and needs to have someone push her to study” (from the second interview). She makes herself concentrate only in this way on her study. However, this condition is not easy to be achieved since she does not have enough ability to control herself from the temptation to watch TV or play computer games. Neither does she have any significant others to regulate her learning. Therefore, her confidence in learning English well depends on something which is difficult to achieve. No wonder she can hardly have any confidence in her ability to learn English.

In addition, her academic performance is usually subject to the condition of her physical and emotional health. She appears to be very unenthusiastic the times when she feels down. As a result, she can not make learning interesting on her own. This has a deep influence on her ability to take on responsibility in learning. As she suffers from depression occasionally, she repeats the idea of “jumping down from the 5th floor” (from the first interview) and does not seem to have enough ability to control her depression and her emotions. She is not interested in doing anything and seems very unhappy and powerless.

On the other hand, her physical condition also reduces her confidence and makes her feel embarrassed. She said,

The right part of my body always shakes unconsciously including my arms, hands and legs, which irritates me and embarrasses me a lot. I have already told my mother and gone to the doctor several times, but my condition cannot be improved and my mom didn't show her concern for me after that, which made me even more isolated and lonely. I feel ashamed and shy. I thought it could be part of the reason that I found everything boring in school.

(From the first interview, August 4th, 2006)

Even her best friend Jasmine, another case in this study, and the one with whom she had a quarrel with later in the study, could not make her feel better. No wonder Jin Pin wanted to jump down from the 5th floor to enjoy the “good feeling of flying” (from the first interview). She perhaps believed that in this way she could find some happiness.

Nevertheless, when she feels alright, especially when it comes to the listening tasks on which she can perform well, she turns out to be over confident and encourages herself a lot by giving herself a lot of oral rewards, like “I'm great, am I not?” or “I know I'm a genius!”

As a teacher, I see several reasons for her poor confidence. First, she gives up too soon and too easily. She finds everything “boring and meaningless” and so gives up more easily than the other three cases. In response to my question as to the reason why she thought the school was boring, she said,

I don't know. I just don't feel interested in anything or any subjects. I don't want to come to school. What used to be interesting to me has become boring now. I cannot keep my attention on anything for a long time. I am passive in many things and I lose my patience easily.

(From the first interview, January 16th, 2006)

Indeed, I observed that Jin Pin lost her interest in everything very quickly. It did

not mean that nothing could interest her, yet it showed that she possessed a strong resolution at the beginning of everything, but did have trouble sticking to the task long enough to enable her to be successful. Her performance in this study can be taken as a good example. Jin Pin was full of resolution at the very beginning of this study. She actively promised the researcher to be diligent in learning English by saying,

I will keep up the good work. You need to help me to find some useful ways to improve my English. I just can't find ways to study English myself. I will carry on and cheer up to work hard only if you can tell me how to improve my English. You don't need to worry! I will not let you down.

(From the second interview, August 4th, 2006)

In fact, she indeed showed her resolution at first to study by taking notes neatly and really concentrating in class. However, as the time went by, she gradually lost control of her behavior and became less attentive two to three months later. Later on, she was usually occupied by something else and fooled around in class. Since she gave up too soon, her English did not really improve. Even though she promised to do the homework, she did not really finish it. It turned out that she had a hard time persisting in the required tasks. For instance, she promised to keep a learning journal at the beginning stage of the study, but did not really accomplish the task because she lost her resolution soon after she had made the promise. She dropped keeping a learning journal because it took too much time and she could not immediately improve her English. It is not hard to discover that she is desperate to find some "quick" methods that can immediately improve her English. If the methods can not promise any positive effects immediately, she quickly loses her patience and just gives up. Nevertheless, she attributes her failure in benefiting from these methods to the fact that these methods are "not suitable for her" and that "she needs to find something that is designed exclusively for her" (from the second interview). She does

not attribute her failure to maintaining enough resolution to persist in the required tasks.

Second, she does not have as many good friends as the other three students do. Jin Pin appears to be more passive and introverted in her social relationships with others. Jin Pin talked much less about herself when she was accompanied by Jasmine in the group interview. Most of the time, she was listening to Jasmine talk about herself. At that time, Jasmine was still a good friend who would encourage her when she was bored and upset. Nevertheless, Jin Pin still complained, "I do not have any good friends and do not find many people understand me. The one that is really close to me has already graduated" (from the first interview). Therefore, she did not have enough friends to help her or she did not actively make friends with ones that could be a model for her.

Even if she tried to make friends with classmates who knew how to learn well, they might not be willing to share the tips with her. For example, Jin Pin had once been good friends with Jasmine, who had provided help and given her the drive to learn. However, they had a fight at the later stage of this study simply because Jasmine refused to share with Jin Pin the tips she found useful for learning for the reason that she thought Jin Pin could not understand these strategies. Jin Pin's self-image was deeply hurt and they were not as close as they had been. Jin Pin was deeply affected by this event and lost all interest in English. Her grades in English accordingly turned worse rapidly. Her performance in class showed that she could not concentrate at all. Instead, she fooled around with her classmates or just spaced out. She spent lots of time looking into the mirror in class without even opening her textbook, let alone finishing homework or any other required tasks. It seemed that she had already given up on learning, which made her quite different from the other three

students who were still very competitive.

Jin Pin turned to make friends with those who did not care much about learning. Most of her friends already had too many other things to worry about, like their social relationships or their appearances. Jin Pin found it hard to talk about her learning problems with these friends. Naturally, she tended to care less about her learning as well when she was with them. Without a friend from whom she could learn academically and also from whom she could find comfort when she felt frustrated, she always feels lonely and helpless when it comes to learning.

In conclusion, Jin Pin's family background indeed influences her a lot in that when she feels lonely and hopeless in learning, she can not find a more knowledgeable guide to offer her immediate help, even though she has more freedom to do whatever she likes when she is at home compared to the other three students. Meanwhile, her poor social relationships at school affect her academic performance a lot. As she has no close friend to learn from in English, she is not confident in learning. She is so frustrated that she tends to seek only those quick methods which promise immediate effects on her English proficiency. Accordingly, she does not have any patience to wait for her academic performance to improve because it takes time to achieve. Since she can not gain the immediate improvement as easily as she wishes and does not persist in the required tasks, she becomes even more discouraged and thus holds a pessimistic attitude toward herself as well as her learning.

C) Jin Pin's Attitude toward Herself and Learning

Having no significant others around her and having no confidence in English, Jin Pin assumes a passive role in learning. She also attributes her problems in English to her passive attitude. She knew that she definitely needed to find significant others to

assist her. In the second interview, we had the following discussion:

R: Do you think you should be responsible for your own learning?

JP: I “think” I should be responsible for my own learning, but do you know what?

I really do need someone to assist me and to tell me explicitly ways to improve my English; otherwise, I just totally lose my direction and feel perplexed. I have been trying so long without seeing any improvement! I just can not find my own way to improve my English. They [the methods she had already tried] just don’t suit me at all. As you know, I am always passive in everything! I need help. I need you to tell me something that is easy and exclusively designed for me.

R: What methods have you tried?

JP: Well, I don’t know. I cannot tell. You had better tell me some quick and efficient ways to improve my English.

(From the second interview, August 4th, 2006)

Indeed, most of the time, Jin Pin was very eager to learn easy methods that could immediately improve her English. However, she could not mention any methods that she had tried. She just remembered that all the methods that she had tried were something that she had learned or heard of from others by chance. No wonder she did not really know how to use these methods thoroughly; consequently, she could not really benefit from them, either. The only thing she had learned from employing these methods was a sense of failure, so she claimed that “they were all unsuitable for me.”

Meanwhile, she did not seem to have the ability to find suitable methods herself; she lacked the “appropriate methods or strategies” to take on her responsibility actively. When Jin Pin was accompanied by Jasmine in the group interview and listened to Jasmine reporting about strategies that she found useful to her, she cried out for help by asking the researcher to offer some “efficient strategies that were designed exclusively for her so that she could also be like Jasmine, who is so confident about herself” (from the first interview). It was obvious that Jin Pin envied Jasmine very much because Jasmine had found many useful strategies. Yet, Jin Pin

could not acknowledge the idea that she could also learn from Jasmine's strategies. It was not until I told her that Jasmine's strategies could also work for her that she suddenly understood and revealed her pleasure and promised happily that she would give them a try.

It seems that Jin Pin is not so resourceful in strategy use, neither is she sensitive enough to the existence of the strategy. Therefore, when she heard other people talk about a strategy they had used, she could not recognize what the strategy was and did not have sufficient knowledge about when or how to employ the strategy.

According to my observation of her daily performance, she is more like a sponge waiting passively for someone who can add water on her so that she can absorb something from the instruction. She cannot actively take action to improve herself. Instead, she prefers to let others tell her what to do so that she can feel more secure. In other words, she is a passive receiver waiting for other people's guidance in the process of learning.

As discussed earlier, Jin Pin lacks enough resolution to persist in a task. She drops out too fast and needs someone to push her constantly and encourage her. She is not brave enough to endure failure and not confident enough to work on a task for which she can not see an effect. She does not give herself enough time to practice the strategies she has learned and does not possess enough elasticity to allow herself to make any mistakes. She loses her interest and gives up right away once the strategy cannot promise success immediately. In other words, she has already dropped out before she can see the effectiveness of practicing the strategy.

Jin Pin is in the process of "other-regulation" because she definitely needs adult surrogates or some more knowledgeable guides to scaffold as well as to encourage her constantly when she feels fragile so that she could be brave enough to go forward and

give something a try. However, there does not seem to be an influential adult surrogate for Jin Pin at hand. Her parents know neither how to solve her problems in English nor understand her emotional problems. I, as her teacher, cannot be influential because she is always too passive to ask for help from me or the other teachers. Therefore, it seems that Jin Pin is lonely most of the time in her learning process.

Nevertheless, Jin Pin is quite willing to take responsibility for her learning when she is asked to. Social interaction with other people plays an important role in her learning. Jin Pin might be more willing to take on responsibility and would learn more effectively without feeling so lonely and fragile if she was given the better guidance.

What seems more serious is that her emotions influence her ability to take on the responsibility of learning efficiently.

All these reasons not only influence her ability to take on the responsibility of learning, but also make her lack confidence in her ability as a learner.

In conclusion, Jin Pin possesses a pessimistic attitude toward herself and learning. She is not confident in her learning ability due to her lack of ability to control her negative emotions, her inability to be resourceful in employing useful learning strategies, her poor health condition both mentally and physically, and to her lack of ability to make good use of her social relationships.

After examining the four cases individually, the summary of these four cases' performance at school, attitudes toward learning, and their strategy use were presented respectively in the following Table 4.1.5, Table 4.1.6, and Table 4.1.7 to make the comparison among them clearer.

Table 4.1.5 *Summary of the Four Cases' Performance at School*

case	Performance at school
Natalie	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The top 2nd of her class. 2. A more skilled listener. 3. Strong self-regulation and self-management ability. 4. Has high motivation to learn only to please someone she trusts.
Jasmine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The top 8th of her class. 2. A more skilled listener. 3. An independent learner holding positive attitude toward learning. 4. Has high motivation to learn to enjoy the process of learning.
Tom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The top in other subjects, yet, the 15th in English. 2. Even with resolution to learn, he lacks flexible English learning strategies. He treats English as a formula, like math.
Jin Pin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The 31st in her class. 2. A less skilled listener. 3. Passive to take action to learn. Unconfident of herself and her social relationships.

Table 4.1.6 *Summary of the Four Cases' Attitudes toward Learning*

Name	Attitudes toward learning and their roles in learning
Natalie	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She plans, monitors, and evaluates her learning. 2. She believes that she can learn well if she is willing to, or if she is assisted by a tactful teacher she trusts. She learns to please these significant others. 3. She always needs someone she trusts to push her to study; otherwise, she will fight back or simply fool around.
Jasmine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She assumes an active role in learning, taking the learning responsibility and makes good use of opportunities to learn. 2. With the help from her tutor, she approaches English more effectively.
Tom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He has strong sense of responsibility and competitive spirit to learn, only that his attitude toward learning strategies is negative, believing it is a short cut and is not supposed to learn. 2. He is not confident enough to count on himself and therefore, he only follows instructions.
Jin Pin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She holds a passive view toward learning, waiting for someone to give her the solutions she can see immediate effects; otherwise, she drops out for not gaining achievement. 2. She lacks confidence and always needs someone to regulate her learning. 3. Her passive attitude also affects her social relationships. She always feels lonely and hopeless for not finding a friend from whom she could learn academically.

Table 4.1.7 *Summary of the Four Cases' Strategy Use*

Name	Strategy use
Natalie	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepares herself to concentrate. 2. Be aware of any shift of her attention and redirects herself. 3. Uses selective attention, background knowledge to conclude from the context. Attends to the meaning. 4. Takes notes while listening. 5. Evaluates what she has heard and asks for clarification.
Jasmine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attends to the meaning, not to the form, unless if required. 2. Uses background knowledge to inference or guess. 3. Takes notes while listening.
Tom	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Uses direct translation most often. 5. Memorizes big words without knowing how to put them in a sentence. 6. Can not make association from words to pictures.
Jin Pin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uses selective attention and guessing, but guesses roughly not wisely. 2. Can not be aware of any shift in her attention and therefore, usually fools around while listening. 3. Doesn't take notes because spelling is hard for her.

4.2 To What Extent Can the Four Cases Be Considered Good Learners

Table 4.2.1 below shows the performance of each student with reference to the average scores of five weekly listening tests on A+ magazine, an English learning magazine designed for junior high school students, and three monthly tests as well as one Sample GEPT Listening Test. Among the intact class consisting of 37 students, the performance of Natalie, Jasmine, Tom, and Jin Pin is respectively ranked as the 2nd, the 8th, the 15th, and the 31st. The highest possible score on the GEPT is 120, and one has to score more than 80 to pass the exam. Two students did not take the Sample GEPT Listening Test and their scores were marked with an X. Natalie (108), Jasmine (92) and Tom (80) scored higher than the mean (77.411) while Jin Pin (36) was far below the average. However, Tom only scored 80, the minimal requirement for passing GEPT. A better understanding of these four cases' English listening proficiency can be achieved through Table 4.2.1. It is also possible to gauge the extent to which each of them can be considered a good learner.

Table 4.2.1
The Performance of Each Case in Comparison With That of the Whole Class

Semester Score Ranking	Student	Listening Tests Average	Sample GEPT LT (Total Score 120)	Monthly Tests Average	The Average of All Tests
1 st	8	94	120	96.5	103.5
2 nd	13. Natalie	93.3	108	99	100.1
3 rd	15	81.66	108	98.5	96.05333
4 th	40	82.5	112	92.5	95.66667
5 th	20	95.83	X	87.5	91.665
6 th	44	76.66	108	87.5	90.72
7 th	1	89	88	94	90.33333
8 th	14 Jasmine	83.16	92	93	89.38667
9 th	6	66.33	104	84.5	84.94333
10 th	46	67.5	96	89	84.16667
11 th	38	64.16	96	90	83.38667
12 th	34	67.83	80	90	79.27667
13 th	32	59.83	104	73.5	79.11
14 th	42	55.83	80	95.5	77.11
15 th	30. Tom	55	80	96	77
16 th	2	61	76	89.5	75.5
17 th	18	71	72	81.5	74.83333
18 th	11	58.83	76	89	74.61
19 th	19	42.5	80	83	68.5
20 th	35	36	76	89.5	67.16667
21 st	37	57.5	72	71.5	67
22 nd	28	50.83	72	72.5	65.11
23 rd	47	45	76	71	64
24 th	3	43.33	68	67	59.44333
25 th	17	38.3	76	60	58.1
26 th	31	39.83	60	74	57.94333
27 th	21	46.5	X	68	57.25
28 th	10	41.6	52	68	53.86667
29 th	29	42.5	72	39	51.16667
30 th	27	28.33	60	65	51.11
31 st	5. Jin Pin	52.5	36	59.5	49.33333
32 nd	9	40	52	47	46.33333
33 rd	39	15.66	64	37.5	39.05333
34 th	16	25.88	48	39	37.62667
35 th	36	24.33	48	15.5	29.27667
36 th	26	35.8	X	16.5	26.15
37 th	43	25.16	20	18	21.05333
	Mean of The Whole Class	55.53973	77.41176	72.66216	68.02284

According to many studies on the qualities of “good language learners” (Rubin 1975, Naiman *et al.* 1978, Ellis 1994), there are several recognizable characteristics of good language learners. Those presented in the list below are based on Ellis (1994). Good language learners will:

1. Be able to respond to the group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions;
2. Seek out all opportunities to use the target language;
3. Make maximum use of the opportunities afforded to practice listening to or responding to speech in the L2 addressed to him and to others-- this will

involve attending to meaning rather than to form.

4. Supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists)—this is likely to involve attention to form;
5. Be an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child, at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned;
6. Possess sufficient analytical skills to perceive, categorize and store the linguistic features of the L2, and also to monitor errors;
7. Possess a strong reason for learning the L2 (which may reflect an integrated or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong task motivation (i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen or provided);
8. Be prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish;
9. Be capable of adapting to different learning conditions (p. 122-123).

With this list, it is possible to consider how each of the four cases can be regarded as a good learner.

4.2.1 Natalie

Natalie possesses several characteristics of a good language learner. Her performance in English and her active attempts to use English (see 4.1.1) reveal that she indeed has invested a lot of efforts in English learning. From her responses to the questionnaire and the interviews, she reported having the habit of attending to the meaning as a whole but not to the detailed forms. She said, “I always listen to the main idea first and then the detail while listening” (from the third interview). This habit is also relevant to her reading skills. She shows more interest in reading an

article to appreciate the content, but when she is required to pay more attention to the details, such as prepositions, phrases, sentence patterns, or idioms, she shows a strong reluctance to do so and describes these things as “trivial and boring” (from the third interview). She described her learning experience in one of her cram schools as “boring because it always focuses on the trivial parts such as prepositions or sentence patterns” (from the first interview). She ended up dropping the course one month later due to a lack of a sense of achievement.

Natalie is apparently reluctant to pay close attention to details; however, the results of not facing these details make her upset because she usually makes mistakes at such points and gets a bad score on the tests focusing on details. She is a highly self-demanding student with a strong competitive spirit, and she can not accept her mistakes and knows that she has to push herself to focus on improving these “trivial parts.” So I always see her trying very hard on exercises which are designed to focus exclusively on the detail while still complaining about doing so. She prepares for these tests by making neat and clear notes in which she marks the sentences where she easily makes mistakes and so monitors her own errors. She treats her mistakes as failures, and is really upset about making them. According to my observation, she treats herself so rigorously that she even asked me more than once to punish her whenever she made mistakes. And she indeed tries very hard to avoid making mistakes.

In addition, she possessed a strong motivation to learn English. For example, one of the reasons that motivated her to learn English was helping her friend Ellisa in the U.S to learn Chinese. In addition, she has a strong sense of competition, and pushes herself to score 100 on every test. In fact, she managed to get 100 on exams 5 times continuously. Her mastery over English gives her an even stronger drive to seek for

more success. She finds success in the listening tasks in the English video clips which I gave to the students. Since she could do well on all the tasks I gave her, she was motivated to follow up by searching on the Internet for more interesting English videos and mailed those videos to me.

Furthermore, she also made maximum use of the opportunities afforded to practice listening or responding to speeches in the English addressed to her. She actively sought out opportunities to practice English. For instance, she talked on the MSN with her Chinese friends in English just to “encourage them to practice English, too.” She said,

My intention to talk on the Internet in English is just to encourage them to practice English, especially Tom. I want to “make fun of” Tom, so that he needs to spend much more time on English in order to compete with me. However, in doing so, he will have no time to prepare for the other subjects. I can only have a chance to compete with Tom at this time. My English is better than his, so I do not need to spend as much time on English as he does and I have more time to prepare for the other subjects. Because I force Tom to spend time on English, he finds himself lacking enough time to prepare for the other subjects.

(From the second interview)

All things above suggest that Natalie has a great potential to be considered a good learner. However, several things impede the development of this potential.

First, instead of learning for herself, she learns to please other people important to her. This can be revealed in the following event when she put effort into preparing for the English speech contest. Ever since she knew that she had been appointed to join the speech contest, she practiced very hard by choosing several advanced level articles in an English magazine herself and reciting all of them. She made it a rule to recite them in front of me every two days to let me check her performance and guide her. One day she was very upset because I was not able to train her at our appointed time due to some administrative reasons. She was so angry that she said to me, “You

let me down.” She stopped concentrating in class after writing in the diary, “I hate you” in large letters. Neither has she talked to me since. I was very disappointed because I thought she should have understood the difficult situation I was in, but she couldn’t. She said,

I hate you. I studied for so long yesterday because you wished me to do so, and now you don’t have time to listen to me. I quit! I won’t do it again! And I don’t like preparing for the speech, any way.

(From the learning journal, March, 2006)

At that very moment, the revelation that she really learned for me, not out of her own volition came to me again. She cares so much about her performance in English not because she wants to learn for herself, but because she wants to please me and to gain my recognition. In this case, she was definitely doing something she did not want to do at all; she did it only because I wished her to do so. However, after examining her reaction, I think that there might also be other reasons for her anger. It seems that Natalie, who always learns so as to please me, needs to be approved or praised by me first before she can totally trust herself as a good learner and really learn in the way that a good learner does: to learn not for pleasing others, but out of her own volition and for herself. That is, after being recognized, she can only move forward from other-regulation to self-regulation. That is to say, unless her significant others recognize her performance and consider her as a good learner, she will not have a self-image as a good learner and neither can she really benefit from the process of learning because she does not learn out of her volition or for herself. Instead, she still thinks herself not good enough to be autonomous and stays in the stage of other-regulation to feel secure as she has no confidence to go forward. Consequently, she can not transfer to self-regulation confidently and successfully. Therefore, her attitude of learning for other people but not for herself turns out to influence her self-image as

a good learner, and indeed impedes her development of her potential to be a good learner.

Natalie's reaction to the result of English speech contest further reveals that she is under great influence from her emotions, which might also be another reason that impedes her potential as a good learner. She was ranked the eighth among the 50 competitors, which was not good enough for her. She was very disappointed and she repeatedly told me, "I hate English, and I will drop it no matter what you say" (from a chat during class break, a day in April, 2006). She was continuously bothered by this negative emotion over the next few days. She told me that she didn't want to study at all even though the mid-term was approaching. Instead, her mind was occupied by some other things like having fun, fooling around or watching TV. She described it clearly in the journal,

I had trouble concentrating on the study or doing anything. I just want to have fun or watch TV. Everything seems so meaningless to me including my efforts and my devotion to English. I have tried so hard and gained nothing. What should I feel? I was upset and knocked out. I feel like a loser. I think I am really not good at English, am I?

(From the learning journal, a day in April, 2006)

To sum up, this event reveals that Natalie is deeply controlled by her emotions while learning. Once she is not successful, she is easily beaten. In other words, she is still in the other-regulation process because she let other things control her learning. These other things include the recognition from her significant others, a successful learning result, and her own emotions. Only when she can gain all these will she have a successful self-image. If not, it is likely that she might lose interest and courage to learn, which further impede her potential to be a good learner.

There was still one more event that can clearly show that she is still in other-regulation and that she tends to be under the influence of her attitudes toward the

learning situation (ALS) as in Gardner's term (1985). Gardner suggests ALS as one of the three components of "integrative motivation", motivation that differs from "instrumental motivation" in that the former refers to the desire to learn a language to identify with the target language community and to communicate with the people in this community, while the later refers to the desire to learn a language for the sake of fulfilling certain goals like passing an examination or getting a job. ALS refers to "the learners' evaluation of the language course and the instructor and is defined as the degree to which the student possesses a positive attitude toward both" (MacIntyre & Noels, 1996). In Gardner's model (1985), motivation plays a key role that most affects students' achievement in the second language. And motivation is based on the positivity of the attitudes toward the learning situation (ALS). In other words, the more positive the ALS a learner possesses, the higher motivation toward learning a language he or she has.

In the event mentioned before in Chapter 4.1 in which Natalie treated a substitute teacher rudely, her reaction suggested that she was totally influenced by her ALS. She said,

I just felt that the substitute teacher was too harsh and strict, which is something that I really dislike. And I could not stand his pronunciation and his accent. I don't think he made himself clear enough to let me understand him. So I did not pay attention to him at all. I just wanted to express my anger and to see what would happen.

(From the journal and the interview during class break, in August)

She admitted that she did not pay attention at all to the substitute teacher, which was quite contrary to her ordinary behavior towards her teachers. Her revolt against the harsh discipline and the accent of the substitute teacher suggested that her attitude towards the learning situations was quite unfavorable, leading to her low motivation

to learn at that time.

This event also reminds me that Natalie's other-regulated attitude makes her unable to adapt to different learning environment once her significant others are not with her. She hands herself totally to others but not to herself. Therefore, the teacher really plays an important role in Natalie's learning process. According to Oxford (2001), students' perceptions of their teachers' communicative style are related to their intrinsic motivation and that teachers may have an important effect upon language learners' belief about themselves as learners and how they actually undertake learning. For Natalie, her attitude to learning is like a gamble in which she takes the risk of letting the teachers she encounters control her learning process. She only learns for the teachers who she trusts. In other words, the way she behaves may show that she possesses the central characteristic of elementary functions mentioned by Vygotsky in that she is "totally or directly determined by stimulation from the environment" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.39). Most of the time, she is passively required to do something she likes or dislikes by other people in her learning environment. As she is not fully transferred to self-regulation, the stage in the development of the higher order thinking skills in Vygotsky's theory, her internal management and regulation of learning has not been fully developed so as to initiate her to learn actively out of her volition (Henderson & Cunningham, 1994). Although she is considered a good learner under some conditions with good independent problem-solving skill, she still needs her significant others to take her into her ZPD and to build scaffolding for her so that she can be assisted to progress without crashing down.

It also suggests that she has a stronger resolution to accomplish a learning task only on the condition that she is in the right mood and is willing to do so. If not, she will be easily influenced by her negative emotions and give up the tasks easily. Her

attitudes toward the learning situation affect her a lot in that once her evaluation of the language course and the instructor is not positive, she chooses to give up. Such an attitude also echoes the theory of McCombs (1990) because he suggested that the attitudes and beliefs about the student's self and the learning environment could influence his or her tendency to approach, expend effort in, and persist in learning tasks on a continuing self-directed basis.

In conclusion, even though Natalie had a high motivation to learn and has enough strategies to learn effectively, attention should be given to Natalie's attitudes before discussing about her potential to be a good learner. What she needs is not only the guidance in how to improve her English which is what I believe she can already do without anyone's help; instead, she needs her significant others to help her deal with her unstable emotions, cultivate positive attitudes toward the learning situation, encourage her to persist in her tasks, and lead her to further trust herself on her way of self-regulation. Her significant other needs to be more like a spiritual guide than a knowledge instructor. If this condition can be achieved, Natalie is likely to have more potential to be a good learner.

Table 4.2.2 below serves as a summary of the characteristics of a good learner that Natalie possesses according to Ellis (1994).

Table 4.2.2

The Extent to Which Natalie Can Be Considered a Good Learner Based on Ellis (1994)

Characteristics of a good language learner	Check
1. Respond to the group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions;	√
2. Seek out all opportunities to use the target language;	√
3. Make maximum use of the opportunities to practice listening to or responding to speech in the L2 addressed to him and to others-- this involves attending to meaning	√
4. Supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists)— this is likely to involve attention to form;	√
5. Be an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child, at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned;	

6. Possess sufficient analytical skills to perceive, categorize and store the linguistic features of the L2, and also to monitor errors;	√
7. Possess a strong reason for learning the L2 (which may reflect an integrated or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong task motivation (i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen or provided);	√
8. Be prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish.	√
9. Can adapt to different learning conditions	

* A check indicates that Natalie displays this characteristic.

* No check indicates that Natalie lacks this characteristic.

4.2.2 Jasmine

Jasmine's English performance, which puts her at the top 8% of her class, shows she also has potential to be a good language learner. First, she is able to control herself to adapt to the group dynamics so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions. She appears to be very positive with confidence in her learning ability, which is not a common thing in her class according to my observation and her performance in my class. Only a few students are as confident as her. Usually, most students are introverted if they can not be as good as the top students. They tend to respect only those students who manage to perform well as the top 3 in their class and they will listen to and agree to what these top students say. Jasmine is not good enough to be among the top three students, and naturally can not win trust from her classmates and is always questioned when she has an opinion to express in English. Many students like to tease her, especially when she is trying to respond to my English questions. She performs very courageously by defending for herself with an easy smile on her face instead of feeling frustrated or shy when being attacked by her classmates. What surprises me is that she never gives up learning English even if her classmates keep teasing her. She holds her ground and keeps expressing her opinions to speak out for herself without being inhibited nervous when being laughed at. What's more, she tries even harder to improve herself in English. When I asked her

about how she dealt with the problems she found with her classmates, she responded, “I easily let go of the negative emotions and find a way to encourage myself. I see no point in being nervous while learning English or doing the listening comprehension tests” (from the second interview). That is how she adapted to the group dynamic so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions.

Second, Jasmine possesses positive attitudes toward learning especially when receiving listening strategy instruction. She said, “I think the strategies are quite useful to my learning” (from the third interview). While practicing the strategy after my instructions, she appeared to be very attentive and optimistic toward the challenges especially when I played several video advertisements conducted in English or some other languages for the class. She immediately noted down almost every unknown word clearly and neatly, and she imitated the word several times as the advertisements were played. She quickly grasped the meaning from the advertisements regardless of the fact that she might not really understand all the words in the advertisements. She attends to the meaning but not to the form, which helps her to grasp the meaning of the advertisement quickly and laugh happily at the content using background knowledge to help her get the meaning from the context (see p.59). She also makes efforts to reorganize the notes taken in class and rewrites these words on special vocabulary cards with different markers and memorizes the words not only at home but also when she is waiting for the bus. In this way, she can improve her listening and her spelling.

Third, Jasmine is active in finding ways to improve English. For example, she watches several English TV programs such as HBO, or the Cinema channel without taking any look at the subtitles to improve her listening ability. No wonder she said in the interview, “The pictures, but not the words, were great help for me to understand

the content” (from the second interview).

Jasmine also seeks out opportunities to use English as discussed earlier. She is quite ready for all the challenges and she never hesitates to take risks (see p. 65). Her resolution to learn English was revealed by her volunteering to help the twelve British scholars to visit our school because she is not afraid of appearing foolish. Influenced by her tutor, she also reads several short novels such as *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, and *The Mummy* to enrich her understanding of English. She also reads these novels in a way that is quite different from that used by other students. She said,

My tutor reads out the whole article for me so that I can listen to the whole story first before I start to read it on my own since my reading ability is not good enough for me to decipher certain long words that are created by combining several easy words together. In this way, I get more chances to improve my listening ability by “listening to” the story first to really understand the content.

(From the second interview)

Jasmine is thus guided first through the tutor’s reciting the story and later, she is able to acquire the ability to read on her own after the tutor withdraws her help. In this way, Jasmine gets several chances to increase her understanding of the unknown parts. And she can fix her problems more efficiently now.

Moreover, she has “integrative motivation”, the motivation to learn a language in order to identify with the target language community and to communicate with the people from the community as in Gardner’s term (1972). She is not so concerned about her academic grades, but she simply likes English and she possesses a positive attitude toward meeting and communicating with members of the English community. She is interested in English pop songs, novels, and movies. Jasmine enjoys the process of exploring English through all these methods. She seldom studies for grades;

on the contrary, she studies for fun and for herself. Her ways of learning make her more autonomous compared with Natalie, Tom, and Jin Pin. Jasmine can really enjoy herself in the process of learning English whereas the other three study for someone or something else but not for themselves.

Jasmine is also capable of adapting to different learning conditions. She seldom shows any uneasiness when the learning environment is different. As discussed earlier, there was a time when the students in my class were taught by a substitute teacher. The learning environment was different because the substitute teacher differed from me not only in the way he managed the classroom but also in the way he taught. He had stricter principles for the students to follow and he also had a different accent when speaking English. However, Jasmine manifested her ability to adapt to this different learning environment. Having a substitute teacher did not change Jasmine's attentiveness. She managed to control her emotions and respected the substitute teacher by following the rules set by him. She kept the same positive learning attitude no matter how noisy the other classmates were. From this event, it is clear that she tries to be responsible for her own learning, in fact; she does her best not to be affected by anyone else.

Also, she uses study techniques to supplement her learning. There was a time when I grouped the students in the class and required each group to prepare one week's materials on their own to teach their classmates. Jasmine and Natalie were in the same group. Both of them were so active and responsible in preparing for the teaching that they both typed several pages of handouts in which the grammar focuses were selected and marked according to their own judgment. The notes they made were far better than those that a normal junior high school student could make because they looked like what could only be found in the best grammar books sold on

the market. When questioned, Natalie admitted that she had just referred to a grammar book and typed the material from the book while Jasmine had something far beyond that. Jasmine had made an effort to reorganize the content and had translated all the important grammar points then retyped them so that the notes looked very concise and to the point. After that, she made sure that her material was examined by her mother. Her first draft was not good enough for her mother and she received several suggestions from her mother to reorganize the notes and make them better. However, in spite of the fact that Jasmine also received some help from her mother, it is she herself who translated the whole of the materials and personally designed several blanks to let her classmates fill in the gaps. The content of the handouts reveal that she possesses sufficient analytical skills to perceive, categorize, and store the linguistic features of English. She also knows how and when to monitor her errors because the blanks she made for her classmates to fill in are all places where the most common errors might happen. Therefore, Jasmine has the ability to both attend to the meaning and to the form if she is required to do so, and she is also capable of using her study techniques to improve her learning.

In conclusion, Jasmine has great potential to be regarded as a good learner as she has strong integrated motivation, uses effective learning strategies, has more knowledgeable guides around her, and controls her emotions well and encourages herself to learn positively.

Table 4.2.3 below is a summary of the characteristics of a good learner that Jasmine possesses based on Ellis (1994).

Table 4.2.3*The Extent to Which Jasmine Can Be Considered a Good Learner Based on Ellis (1994)*

Characteristics of a good language learner	Check
1. Respond to the group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions;	√
2. Seek out all opportunities to use the target language;	√
3. Make maximum use of the opportunities to practice listening to or responding to speech in the L2 addressed to him and to others-- this involves attending to meaning rather than to form.	√
4. Supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists)—this is likely to involve attention to form;	√
5. Be an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child, at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned;	√
6. Possess sufficient analytical skills to perceive, categorize and store the linguistic features of the L2, and also to monitor errors;	√
7. Possess a strong reason for learning the L2 (which may reflect an integrated or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong task motivation (i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen or provided);	√
8. Be prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish;	√
9. Can adapt to different learning conditions	√

* A check indicates that Jasmine displays this characteristic.

* No check indicates that Jasmine lacks this characteristic.

4.2.3 Tom

Tom is quite different from the previous two students. He also has some characteristics of a good language learner; however, several problems hinder his ability to be a good one. Starting from his problems; first, comparing his attitude to learning English with his attitude toward learning in other courses, his attitude toward the learning situation (ALS) for English is not as favorable as that of his attitude to other courses. It is not hard to find that he seems less motivated in learning English than in other courses. When it comes to English, he is not as active in seeking out different ways to improve English as he usually is when learning other courses, especially math, science, and history. In these three courses, he demonstrates special talents and interests in exploring them. For example, he joined the school's math

Olympics club to master math. This is a club in which some elite junior high school students were selected by a qualification test to explore advanced math under the instruction of a university professor. He not only learns calculus on his own, but also demonstrates his interests in math by actively exploring some interesting math-related games, such as Sudoku puzzles, a logic-based number placement puzzle now very popular in newspapers and magazines for people to employ their logic and reasoning to arrange arithmetic numbers from 1 to 9 in a 9 x 9 grid so that every row, every column, and each of the nine 3x3 boxes contains the digits from 1 through 9 either read horizontally or vertically. He also has great interest and ability in deciphering the tips to solve a Rubik's cube problem as fast as possible, which is so-called speed cubing. I saw him spend ten minutes to discover the ways to solve a Rubik's cube before he enthusiastically explained the tips to his classmates and me. We saw the Rubik's cube change its six faces rapidly in his hands to be quickly arranged into one single, solid color so fast that we could hardly catch up with him to figure out what he had tried to explain to us. Tom's ability and enthusiasm in learning these math-related courses make his attitude to English learning an obvious contradiction. He apparently spends less time on English and is considerably less active in employing different ways to learn. In fact, he only does what he is commanded to. Most of the time, he does not take any real action until some people push him, like his mother or Natalie and some of his peers who are good at English in his class. If there is no command from these people, Tom would not seem to have the drive to learn English, if were not for his sense of competition to maintain a good grade as the top student in every subject. According to my knowledge in being his teacher for three years, Tom seldom tries new ways to learn English, which might be due to the following fact. First, he is a student who is smart enough to digest all the materials efficiently in class and

manages to get good grades without spending extra time to review the materials, and so he tends to think that it is not necessary to put extra time into learning English, unlike those who try hard to practice English in various ways. In reality, Tom hardly reviews what he has learned until the tests are approaching (in the second interview). He only studies English when he needs to and depends on the people around him to offer him the drive to learn English. These people influence him in different ways. His mother wants him to memorize vocabulary books in order to expand his vocabulary, whereas Natalie wants him to improve his writing skill by using English to compose his learning journal, which he admitted that he did not spend too much time on. His classmates with better English ability arouse his sense of competition and drive him to work hard in order to catch up with them. He is led by all these people to offer him the drives and the strategies to learn English. Actually, he counts too much on these people. If the strategies they offer are limited, then his learning will be limited or at least be influenced to some extent since he can not figure out or think of any appropriate ways that suit him most by himself.

One factor that leads to his relatively passive attitude to learning English is because he does not know 'how' to improve his English more effectively, unlike the ways in which he is good at when learning other courses. He is not so resourceful in applying efficient strategies to learning English. In fact, he holds a negative perception toward English learning strategies. Tom thinks these strategies are "short-cuts", something not supposed to be used in his sense as discussed earlier (see p.71). He believes in learning English step by step and in a rigid way. Therefore, he seldom attempts to know more about the useful strategies. This finding echoes that of Oxford and Nyikos (1985) in that they found that motivation was the best predictor of learners' strategy use. Namely, strategies can not be effective if learners do not use

them. Tom has no motivation to know more about strategies in English, which influences his English in several ways, especially his writing. Tom is influenced by his mother's strong belief in memorizing words from a vocabulary book, and tends to think that words are the most important part in English and that using formal words in a sentence is a good way to show a better English proficiency. However, he does not know how to use these words in a sentence correctly because he only memorizes them through their literal meaning in Chinese. Therefore, when writing, he tends to use very formal words in very simple sentences and the sentences do not read as English but as something translated directly from the Chinese. In Vandergrift's term (2003), Tom uses 'direct translation' in listening as well as in writing. Instead of using 'top-down' strategies, he uses more 'bottom-up' strategies, which are what less skilled listeners apply more often as suggested in Vandergrift's finding. In addition, he tends to 'decipher' English grammar in the same way as he deciphers math puzzles. For example, he seems to believe that there should be a math formula to explain the sentence patterns and he tries to generate one by counting the frequency of each letter of the alphabet in a sentence and use these frequencies to compose a formula to explain the sentence formation in way that is understandable to him. For him, learning English is like a game in which he exercises his brain trying to figure out the language rules by creating formulas to explain the sentence patterns. This reveals that his way of learning English might not be appropriate judged in the conventional sense.

Interestingly, several aspects of Tom's compensate for his being less active in learning English and his lack of appropriate strategies to improve his English. These aspects mean that he still has potential as a good learner.

First, as a top student in almost every subject, it would be inappropriate to say that Tom does not have any motivation to learn English. Actually, as discussed earlier,

he depends on other people to drive him to learn or to compete. He will be willing to compete whenever there is a competition. He is encouraged to work hard in English only because he wants to be as good as those classmates who have a better English proficiency, just as what he said, “I possess a strong sense of competition to prove that I can make it” (from the second interview). Therefore, while he is not so active in learning English as he might be, he will be motivated to learn English when he competes with more skillful English learners. This can be best shown from an example of the situation when most of Tom’s classmates do not behave well in class and affect all the other students who still want to learn. Usually, the good learners can not really concentrate in such noisy conditions and thus they stop learning and join the group who make noise. Tom’s reaction to this situation reveals that he has better self-regulation ability and higher sense of competition. Tom chooses to be influenced in a positive way only by those classmates who manage to maintain good grades instead of being pessimistic or showing any attempt to give up. He said,

It is because of these good English learners in my class that I still try hard to learn and to put up with the bad situation. Their existence pushes me to go forward and reminds me not to give up. They influence me in a positive way because I want to be as good as them. I believe if they can do it, I can as well.

(From the second interview)

Owing to this sense of competition and self-regulation, Tom monitors his learning and controls himself so well that he still learns while most others can not.

Furthermore, he manages to respond to the learning situation positively without developing any anxiety or inhibition. In fact, he is seldom anxious about learning English, although English seems to be his weakest subject. Instead, he is still very optimistic and attentive in class. He responds to the teacher happily and quickly, and he seems to enjoy the learning process. He is a well-mannered student, and is always attentive, participating in classroom activities in a positive way in all the learning

tasks, either oral or written. He tries every task in an ambitious way no matter how hard it is. Maybe it is because he is not under pressure to maintain a good proficiency in English as Natalie or Jasmine does, that he is less afraid to lose and thus is less anxious about learning English. Tom seems to possess a greater ability to adapt to different learning conditions. Each different learning condition seems to be a new opportunity to learn or a new challenge for him to surmount. Tom is a competitive student, and it does not seem possible for him to develop any sense of inhibition in learning. Instead, the more challenging the task is, the more excited he will be. According to my observation, he seldom possesses any negative emotions toward the learning tasks or the learning environment, unlike the other teenagers who usually complain about everything that they encounter. Compared with his classmates, Tom seemed to know what a student should do by behaving himself in such a way that every teacher regarded him as a mature and respectful student. He said, "I will not allow myself to be influenced by a bad learning environment or by my classmates. Even if I will, it should be in a positive way" (from the second interview).

Owing to his efforts, Tom changed from holding negative attitudes toward learning strategies to actively finding new effective methods to supplement his learning; for example, surfing the net for something which interests him like English sports news, and communicating in English with his cousin, who has good English proficiency. Tom is willing to learn English to communicate with others and get contact with some different cultures other than confining himself in one restricted context; therefore, he has an integrative motivation toward English learning.

In conclusion, Tom is willing to put effort to each learning environment out of a strong sense of competition and self-regulation. Since he possesses greater ability to adapt to different learning situations than the other students in his class, he is more

capable of controlling his emotions in case it may impede his learning. However, his lack of effective English learning strategies might affect his ability to learn English successfully and lead to a lack of confidence. If he can be led well by a more knowledgeable guide who provides effective strategies to approach English, he may well become a good learner, especially with regard to his great potential and resolution to learn well.

Table 4.2.4 below is a summary of the characteristics of a good learner that Tom possesses based on Ellis (1994).

Table 4.2.4

The Extent to Which Tom Can Be Considered a Good Learner Based on Ellis (1994)

Characteristics of a good language learner	Check
1. Respond to the group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions;	√
2. Seek out all opportunities to use the target language;	
3. Make maximum use of the opportunities to practice listening to or responding to speech in the L2 addressed to him and to others-- this involves attending to meaning rather than to form.	
4. Supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists)—this is likely to involve attention to form;	√
5. Be an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child, at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned;	
6. Possess sufficient analytical skills to perceive, categorize and store the linguistic features of the L2, and also to monitor errors;	√
7. Possess a strong reason for learning the L2 (which may reflect an integrated or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong task motivation (i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen or provided);	√
8. Be prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish;	√
9. Can adapt to different learning conditions.	√

* A check indicates that Tom displays this characteristic.

* No check indicates that Tom lacks this characteristic.

4.2.4 Jin Pin

To discuss the extent to which Jin Pin can be considered a good language learner requires that two factors that affect Jin Pin a lot in her learning need to be taken into

account: a) her emotional defeats and b) her physical problems, both of which bothered her constantly.

Emotionally, she is constantly bothered by her low mood and thus, she loses interest in everything easily and claims everything is boring to her (from the first interview). She usually has trouble concentrating in English class and is always fooling around doing something off-task. As she is easily distracted, she suffers from the lack of a sense of achievement in finding learning interesting. She is apparently not confident in her English or her learning ability. She claims that learning English makes her so unhappy and depressed that she wished to jump from the fifth floor to “enjoy the feeling of flying” (from the first interview). I see her frowning at first in class or looking at me uneasily. She seems to be full of questions, waiting for more instruction without really attempting to do the practice or participating in the task. However, while she is still trying to understand the materials, the other students have already begun doing the practice or have moved on to the next step. It seems that she is always trying to catch up. She then gives up if the material is still too difficult for her. In fact, Jin Pin’s only motivation in learning is to earn extra credits, which are also something her parents care about. Therefore, she appears to be somewhat grade-oriented when it comes to learning. She often asks the teacher to give her extra credits because she needs to be encouraged so that she can move on. She said, “If I could get higher points in English, then my motivation to learn English would be increased” (from the second interview). If there are no immediate rewards, like the grades or extra credits, then she is not so willing to learn.

Her passive learning attitude dissuades her from actively seeking out opportunities to use English. Her failure to pass the test at her cram school further reinforced her negative attitude toward English learning. The failure in learning turns

out to be a vicious circle, generating a more passive attitude and resulting in the less sense of achievement.

She also has trouble persisting in the hard work so as to bring about a positive effect on her learning. As she does not have enough resolution to persist in a task, she keeps giving up before she really achieves the goal. Therefore, she experiences only a sense of frustration without having a chance to enjoy the sweet result of her efforts.

Furthermore, she is not able to adapt to different learning conditions mainly because she is too influenced by her emotions, which are deeply controlled by her social relationship with her friends as well as her attitudes towards the learning courses and the instructors. She appeared most depressed and seemed to lose all her energy at school at the time when she had a quarrel with Jasmine. Most of the time, she slept or crunched herself up in her seat with her chin on the table and her face long. She seldom smiled at that time and her grades plunged immediately. I find her emotionally vulnerable: she can not find a way out when she feels down and lost, and this affects her learning condition, impeding her from being a good learner.

On the other hand, she is also bothered physically by the condition of her health. The right part of her body shakes unexpectedly intermittently and makes her embarrassed (see p.81). Even though she has been to the doctor, the shaking movement can not be controlled, and she receives no further concern from her parents after consulting the doctor several times. She finds herself isolated and lonely fighting with the unknown disease. She also believes that the failure to control the right part of her body further influences her social relationships. She feels that this situation keeps her from concentrating.

Therefore, many reasons seem to hinder Jin Pin's ability emotionally and physically to be an autonomous learner. However, this does not mean that she is totally

without hope. She can still perform well under certain conditions, especially when she is not nervous. For example, when doing a listening comprehension test, Jin Pin performs quite confidently. When I asked about her feeling toward the listening test, she said,

I will not be nervous because my listening ability is better than before. Most of the time, I can guess from the pictures or the content. Also, I will preview the test questions to gain a certain understanding and focus on what is being tested. In this way, I find listening tests easy. I will not take notes because my spelling is bad. I will memorize the content and answer the questions.

(From the second interview, August 4th, 2006)

This interview reveals that Jin Pin possesses several good abilities in English especially in listening. Based on several findings of the scholars (Cohen, 1984; Buck, 1991; Scohamy and Inbar, 1991; Yang, 1995; Sherman, 1997; Teng, 1998), test question preview, which Jin Pin claims to use, is an effective listening strategy in that it facilitates listeners' understanding of listening texts, leading test takers to predict the listening contents in advance and making the test items less difficult. Moreover, according to the findings of Chen (2005), the positive effect of 'test question preview' can only be found in listeners of high or medium proficiency level but not in those of low proficiency levels because their poor listening ability as well as reading ability makes them unable to comprehend the meaning of the previewed questions. Therefore, listeners of high and medium proficiency usually gain much more assistance from the 'question preview' than those of low proficiency level. Since Jin Pin knows how to use the strategy of 'question preview' to help her gain 'selective attention' to focus on the detail parts, it is likely that Jin Pin can be considered a listener of medium or high listening proficiency; otherwise the 'question preview' strategy can not have a positive effect on her. Her 'selective attention' enables her to attend to meaning first

and later to form. Her ability to guess from the question preview enables her to make a sound prediction about the content being tested. When she is not nervous and is confident as in the case when she takes a listening test, she can still perform well on the task.

Moreover, Jin Pin is interested in knowing how to improve her English. After claiming that she has tried several times and failed to find what is “suitable” for her (from the first interview, January 16th, 2006), she asks for “suitable strategies that are exclusively designed for her.” Therefore, her problems lie not in having no willingness to learn but in not finding “suitable” strategies to assist her learning. She claims that she has tried many ways but still has not seen a positive effect. Therefore, she gives up. However, I, as her teacher, believe if she is given more time to explore and to practice the strategies, it is still possible for her to gain a sense of accomplishment and that will further encourage her learning. For example, when she learnt about the benefit of making vocabulary lists from Jasmine, she started to employ this study technique and indeed found a positive effect by employing this strategy.

In addition, she has a hope to master English and to gain a sense of achievement when she is not bothered by her emotional downfalls. When I asked her if there was anything which could foster her to learn English, she answered happily, “Of course I would like to show off in front of others if my English is better. I also want to go abroad and make friends with foreigners. In this way, I could have a sense of achievement and be very happy” (from the second interview). Apparently, being able to “show off” her English in front of others can defiantly give her the sense of achievement she longs for, and she is willing to learn English for the sake of this sense of achievement.

She also possesses enough self-awareness to know under what conditions she could learn better. She said, “I think I could also be a good learner in English on the condition that I do not have any chance to watch TV or surf the net” (from the second interview, August 4th, 2006). This reveals that Jin Pin is easily distracted from studying and her self awareness enables her to know she is not attentive in learning.

Since Jin Pin has not totally lost the motivation to learn, especially when she does not feel down and upset, maybe she will still have a chance to overcome her emotional and physical difficulties. She can possess greater potential to be an autonomous learner if she could be assisted with access to significant others, providing her the drive, understanding, encouragement and effective learning strategies to make her an active learner.

Table 4.2.5 below is a summary of the characteristic of a good learner that Jin Pin possesses based on Ellis (1994).

Table 4.2.5

The Extent to Which Jin Pin Can Be Considered a Good Learner Based on Ellis (1994)

Characteristics of a good language learner	Check
1. Respond to the group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions;	
2. Seek out all opportunities to use the target language;	
3. Make maximum use of the opportunities to practice listening to or responding to speech in the L2 addressed to him and to others-- this involves attending to meaning rather than to form	√
4. Supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists)—this is likely to involve attention to form;	√
5. Be an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child, at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned;	
6. Possess sufficient analytical skills to perceive, categorize and store the linguistic features of the L2, and also to monitor errors;	
7. Possess a strong reason for learning the L2 (which may reflect an integrated or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong task motivation (i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen or provided);	
8. Be prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish;	
9. Can adapt to different learning conditions.	

* A check indicates that Jin Pin displays this characteristic.

* No check indicates that Jin Pin lacks this characteristic.

After examining all the characteristics of these four students in 4.2. with regard to their potential to be good language learners, Table 4.2.6 below presents a clearer comparison among them.

It is revealed that Jin Pin apparently has fewer characteristics of a good learner. She develops anxiety and inhibitions more easily (Item 1), thus she is less able to adapt to different learning environments (Item 9). Like Tom, Jin Pin seldom seeks out many opportunities to use English (Item 2). Appearing to lack the motivation to learn (Item7), she is more like a young child who waits for guidance from her significant others (Item 5). Although she is able to attend to meaning rather than to form most of the time (Item 3), she still cannot analyze and monitor her errors (Item6).

Tom, the other less skilled learner, does not seek out more opportunities to use English, either (Item 2). Most importantly, he is the only one who adds to form rather than meaning most of the time (Item 3), suggesting that he is too much influenced by direct translation as discussed earlier. He also, like a young child, waits for his significant others to offer him effective strategies and drive to learn English (Item 5). Yet, owing to his strong competition spirit and sense of responsibility, he monitors his own errors (Item 6) with a purpose to be better (Item7). Without dramatically emotional ups and downs, he seldom gets nervous or inhibited (Item 1). Thus, he is more able to control himself in different learning environments (Item 9).

The student who possesses the most characteristics of a good learner is Jasmine. Jasmine displays greater abilities in adapting to different learning environments than the other skilled listener Natalie (Item 9) and controlling herself from the influence of her emotions. She learns happily out of a strong motivation to enjoy and explore English (Item 7). As a consequence, she is more like an autonomous adult when learning (Item 5), unlike the other three students who are relatively passive, waiting

for someone else to support them.

As a skilled listener, Natalie demonstrates remarkable ability in almost every item except Item 5 and 9. Contrary to Tom, Natalie is influenced by her emotional ups and downs. Her learning is subject to her emotions and her attitudes toward the learning situation. Thus, she can not comfortably adapt to different learning environments (Item 9). The people in a learning environment are extremely important to her. Although she is skillful in learning, she relies too much on her significant others to support her. Without them, she displays strong reactions including resentment or simply drops out. Therefore, she is more like a young child rather than a self-contained autonomous adult (Item5).

Table 4.2.6

Characteristics of the Four Cases as Good Learners Based on Ellis (1994)

Characteristics of a good language learner	Natalie	Jasmine	Tom	Jin
1. Respond to the group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions.	√	√	√	
2. Seek out all opportunities to use the target language.	√	√		
3. Make maximum use of the opportunities to practice listening to or responding to speech in the L2 addressed to him and to others-- this involves attending to meaning rather than to form.	√	√		√
4. Supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists)—this is likely to involve attention to form.	√	√	√	√
5. Be an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child, at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned.		√		
6. Possess sufficient analytical skills to perceive, categorize and store the linguistic features of the L2, and also to monitor errors.	√	√	√	
7. Possess a strong reason for learning the L2 (which may reflect an integrated or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong task motivation (i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen or provided);	√	√	√	
8. Be prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish;	√	√	√	
9. Can adapt to different learning conditions		√	√	

* A check indicates that the learner displays this characteristic.

* No check indicates that the learner lacks this characteristic.