LD SIG Members' Voices
LD SIG メンバーの声

LD SIG Members' Voices offers spaces for SIG members to introduce themselves to other members of the SIG in a variety of accessible and personalised text formats and lengths:

- a short personal profile of yourself as a learner and teacher (100-200 words or so)
- a short critical reflection on your history as a (language) learner at (a) particular stage(s) in your life (around 200-500 words)
- a story of your ongoing interest in, and engagement with, particular learner development (and/or learner autonomy) issues (around 500-800 words)
- a short profile of your learner development research interests and how you hope to develop your research (around 500-800 words)
- a short profile of your working context and the focus on learner development that a particular institution where you work takes and/or is trying to develop (about 800-1200 words)
- some other piece of writing that you would like to contribute and that is related to learner development.

Many thanks to the following SIG members—all new members of the Learner Development SIG from July 2013 to February 2014—for sharing their voices with readers of Learning Learning. We hope other SIG members will also contribute their voice to the next issue of Learning Learning. If you are interested in doing so, please contact the Members' Voices coordinator, Andy Barfield, at <barfield.andy@gmail.com>.

"ＬＤＳＩＧメンバーの声"は、ＳＩＧ会員の皆様が他会員の皆さんに向けて多様な形式・文体・長さで、ご自身の考えや活動をご紹介していただくためのスペースです。例えば、以下のような様々な声を歓迎しています：

- ご自身の学習者および教育者としてのプロフィールを短く紹介したもの。（約100-200語）
- ご自身の（語学）学習者としての経験で、特定の場における逸話を批判的に考察したもの。（約200-500語）
- ご自身が現在取り組まれている、もしくは関心を寄せていることで特に学習者ディベロプメント（または学習者の自律）に関する問題についてのもの。（約500-800語）
- 学習者ディベロプメントに関するご自身の研究についての短い概要と、今後どのようにその研究を展開していきたいと考えているか紹介するもの。（約500-800語）
- ご自身の勤務環境の短い概要と、勤務される特定機関で学習者ディベロプメントに関し注目している、または取り組もうとしていることについて。（約800-1200語）
- その他、学習者ディベロプメントに関する内容のもの。

２０１３年度下半期に学習者ディベロプメント研究部会に新たに参加され、今号で「学習の学習」の読者の皆様と様々な声を共有いただくSIG会員の皆様に、感謝申し上げます。

Learning and Growing in the Young Learner Classroom

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My name is Kathleen Cahill and I teach young learners in *Eikaiwa* lessons in Gifu City, Gifu. I was an artist in the States before I came to teach English for a year, five years ago. Now I am studying to get my MA in TEFL/TESL from Birmingham University.

While I have been teaching for five years, I must admit that I taught my 'first year' for three years, and it wasn't until a little less than two years ago that I began to feel more inclined to develop my teaching skills. Shortly thereafter, I joined JALT and my interest in professional and personal development through teaching and volunteering grew. It is through the connections I have made from being a member of JALT that my eyes have been opened to new ways of teaching and viewing learning, and not simply language learning!

As a teacher of young learners, autonomy is something I struggle with at times. I have discovered some useful activities that I believe foster autonomy; however as a relatively new teacher, the concept still remains somewhat illusive. This is perhaps because I have always associated autonomy with adult learners, and can relate to issues of autonomy through my own experience of learning Japanese. Young learners, especially Japanese young learners, are especially tricky because they cannot be expected to behave in ways you'd expect. They are shy and sensitive to change in some ways, and easily bored and unpredictable in other ways at the same time. An activity they once loved will randomly fall apart another time and become unbearable without explanation! As a teacher of young learners, I therefore believe it is important to be flexible, spontaneous, creative, and willing to compromise with learners about what activities they enjoy.

In some ways I feel that teaching is similar to creating in the fact that both are very process oriented. In creating, I enjoy discovering new techniques for working a material. I try to work the material, usually glass or metal, in a way that disguises it within itself, making the viewer question what he or she is seeing. In many ways I have to do the same thing with my students. I have to disguise educational material in to a game or activity for them to accept it, and they are a brutally honest audience. If they don't like or want to do something, they will quickly vocalize their discontent with little regard to how much effort it took to come up with the idea or make the materials. So sometimes you fail. But teaching, like creating, is an organic process with good and bad experiences that one should never take personally. A good teacher, like any good artist, learns from both kinds of experiences and takes back to the classroom/studio a heightened awareness and new perspectives of how to teach and create.

I feel as though it is my responsibility to create an environment in which my students can feel comfortable and have fun and be challenged. I don't want to put a lot of pressure on them to produce perfect language, but instead try to create situations where they have to use English in order for a game or activity to work. Hopefully those strategies will be transferred to language use in other 'real life' situations. I want them to grow up and remember English as something that was enjoyable so that perhaps they will be inspired to

continue studying into adulthood and become competent users of English.

I'm looking forward to growing as a teacher and learning from my peers. I'm always excited to talk about activities and talk to other teachers about how they teach and what they do in the classroom. Being a member of JALT provides me with so many opportunities to engage in and interact with my local educational community. Hopefully in the future I will be able to inspire someone in the way that so many around me have inspired and influenced me to further develop both personally and professionally.

Teacher development is an essential part of learner development

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Hello, I'm Jenny Morgan and have recently joined the Learner Development SIG after hearing from several colleagues about how pro-active, diverse and relevant the LD SIG is.

As a teacher, it goes without saying that a primary focus of my work day, my lesson planning, and my bigger-picture vision for a healthy classroom learning environment would be *learner development* -- the development of (language) learning skills in my students. And, overlapping those activities is my own *teacher* development. Joining LD SIG is as much about understanding and improving my practices as a

teacher, as it is about exploring ways to better foster learning among my students. *Teacher* development in joining a positive community of practice, the LD SIG, where I have already identified several near-peer role models, mentors, and teachers I want to learn from and share ideas with regarding teacher and learner pathways and identities. The longer I teach, the more I see that *'learner development is teacher development is learner development'*, both being fluid, complementary concepts rather than independent processes; we are all *'co-learners in the classroom space'* (thank you, Tim Murphey).

Currently, I am transitioning between jobs, which makes me reflective, looking back and looking forwards. I am finishing five rich and varied years at Meisei University's International Studies Department, and I will move to Wayo Women's University in the spring. For the last two years, I worked as a program coordinator responsible for the management and support of the 40-plus part-time foreign teachers of compulsory English (Eigo classes). I spent this February, classes over, cruisily working with, learning from, and training the 'new guy' (thanks Martin Mullen); a very satisfying time in handing over systems, concepts and templates to someone who will undoubtedly consolidate and improve the present systems. Now, I mull over the questions of what I'll take through to the next job at a smaller university, where I will be returning to full-time teaching again, meeting new co-learners in new classroom spaces...

Lately, I've been thinking about and questioning the often dichotomous positioning of part-time and full-time teachers; compulsory Eigo students/classes and English communication major students/classes; supposedly motivated and demotivated learners; so-called native speaker and

non-native speaker teachers (of English); and, learner development and teacher development.

Part-time and full-time: After firstly teaching English full-time to International Communication major students for three years at Meisei, I was then offered an amazing opportunity to work in the new two-year position at Meisei as a program coordinator of the compulsory Eigo classes. This was a new position in our university, with no job description or precedent, a lot of potential autonomy regarding textbook selection, curriculum and assessment design, and teacher development, but with constant gate-keeping by several local faculty members. After working in a non-Japanese bubble in the International Studies Centre as a full-time, confident classroom teacher, I was thrown into the General Education Department and felt like a rank beginner-learner again.

I had to learn about the finer machinations of my university from the *part-time* teachers' perspective. I was forced to communicate more directly and cooperatively with General Affairs (*kyoumuka*) staff who coordinate the Eigo timetables and administration issues, and with Japanese English department faculty who ultimately head the compulsory Eigo program. My first year was a steep learning curve, with a bit of treading on toes, and a few intercultural clashes with the department members, as I started to create a positive community of practice amongst the so-called part-time English teachers. I say "so-called" because on talking to these teachers I saw what hardcore FULL-time teachers they all are...they rush into Meisei, and to their other four or five universities throughout the week to teach several *koma*, and later they rush off to teach their evening classes, or to start their long commute back to Saitama and beyond. These teachers do all this

without the professional luxuries I have of an office, a computer and printer, an academic budget for stationery, conferences, research trips and membership subscriptions to different professional organisations. Above all, many teachers working this 'part-time' system teach without the benefit of actual colleagues, office mates, friendly teacher-faces down the hall to shout ideas at, to offload about a dud class, to get support and feedback from.

The part-time teachers that I have had the privilege and pleasure to work with during the past two years at my university have by and large been every bit as professional, engaged and inspirational to their students as the full-time teachers I also work with. On talking with the part-timers, many however do not have any of the teacher development opportunities I've had for a variety of reasons - lack of time, money, opportunity or self- identification as non-researchers, etc. After consulting with various teacher-mentors (thanks Hana Craig), and with the cooperation of the teacher supply companies (*hakken gaisha*), I instigated classroom observations and peer feedback sessions with the transparent goals of *teacher development and support*. This aspect of teacher training and development was consciously carried out using the same skill-set an effective teacher uses in the classroom (thank you, Paul Nation) e.g., scaffolding (methodology concepts) by providing heaps of models and graded language, eliciting rather than telling, and, above all, heaps of positive feedback and encouragement to get the best out of teachers who were struggling to get their students to participate in English learning.

Additionally, I collated lesson-share resources folders, and compiled a regular in-house Professional Development (PD) newsletter to document and share best practices and successful

student-centred classroom activities amongst the part-timers. These initiatives have been welcomed by the Eigo teachers who see these activities as key to supporting them to help their students better learn English, to increase their job satisfaction, and raise their academic status within Meisei. Part-time teachers who previously felt their work was undervalued hopefully now feel recognised for their contribution to the English program at Meisei; full-time teachers (some new to Japanese classrooms) also benefited from these rounds of classroom observations, peer feedback and PD newsletters. Several part-time teachers submitted academic papers to the university's research journal, or gave presentations at our in-house PD forum late last year (this was a first). Finally, there is growing mutual respect and professional understanding among all of us who are involved in the compulsory Eigo program.

Motivated or not: Part-timers report that they feel empowered and better-equipped when there are consistent and repeated models and statements about best practices coming from within their own community of practice. In the absence of a set curriculum at Meisei, we are trying to 'push' a teacher's basic skill-set that fosters learner motivation for English. Many teachers I meet in Japan complain about DE-motivated Eigo students; these teachers struggle with summoning their own enthusiasm for teaching such courses in comparison with the positive regard they have for their supposedly more highly motivated students in English major courses. Due to space limitations, all I can say is what I continually repeat to the full and part-time teachers I work with: "When we take an *asset* view of what our learners can do in any our English classes (rather than a *deficit* view), we will be pleasantly surprised that all/most learners in *any* class can be motivated to learn something,

and to participate very successfully, in their (English) learning."

Native speaker and non-native speaker teachers: I have been lucky to discover and participate regularly in teacher skill-sharing trips to Manila and Vietnam with Teachers Helping Teachers (THT) SIG (see http://www.tht-japan.org/) and Balsamo Outreach for Learning and Teaching (BOLT) NGO - see http://balsamo-outreach.org/aboutbolt.html. This has also helped me become more aware of the connections between learner development and teacher development.

Preparing very practical and relevant skill-sharing workshops to share with local English teachers in the Philippines and Vietnam has been enriching and challenging. It has forced me to really unpack what it is I do in my own classrooms. I have had to think about what can truly be useful for teachers in a different context, teaching language to large numbers of students, with fewer resources, and in different socio-educational classroom cultures.

The local teachers I talked with during THT trips are hungry for teacher development opportunities in order to better foster learner development. They understand that their students - like my students - are more likely to thrive if they are given lots of opportunities to recycle and review language, to personalize their communicative practice, to reflect about and establish their own learning goals. Together, we experience and 'do' various activities and language tasks, and as colleagues we critically reflect on and discuss what ideas/approaches would realistically work given their teaching-learning constraints. Interacting with these multi-lingual teachers of English, discussions often turn to English as a Lingua France (ELF), World Englishes, and these local teachers being the best language role models

for their students. Again, the message is the same from me to them to me – develop a basic, best practice skill-set, a student-centred teaching-learning space, and bags of enthusiasm.

Concluding thoughts: In the very distant past, I was both a *sempai* and a *kohai* in *dojo* far, far away from Japan. I taught self-defence to children and women for 10 years in schools, offices and police departments. Then, I learnt and taught about the power of language to shape minds and bodies. I became a carpenter's apprentice learning to build houses at 32 with bosses and skilful teachers 10 years my junior. I have learnt half a dozen foreign languages quite poorly, and enjoyed them all. Now, as an English teacher and a sometimes researcher, I am extremely fortunate to have a community(s) of practice, Japanese and non-Japanese colleagues who have pushed me to reflect on my teaching and on my students, to continuously improve, adapt and diversify my classroom skills. Colleagues above and beside me have invited me to move beyond classroom teaching and lesson planning, to write papers, carry out research, and present at conferences. These are all things I wouldn't have had the confidence or skills to do by myself.

I see clearly that dichotomies are limiting and usually not the reality; fluid complementary pairings, or indeed *multi-dimensional conceptualizations*, are more useful to me. All these experiences of learning-teaching-working are what I take forward to my new job to foster those students' development as language and life-long learners. I very much look forward to meeting LD SIG members, continuing these discussions, and sharing more about the myriad learner-teacher pathways that we can explore together.

From learner to educator- start a new journey through learner development

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Hello, everyone! My name is Kie Yamamoto. It's been two years since I started my Master's degree in TESOL, and I am pleased to be a member of JALT, as well as the Learner Development SIG. My interest in English teaching was originally rooted in my experiences as a learner. I was born in a small town in Shizuoka, went through typical grammar-translation style English education, and somehow, I decided to study in England, which I believe, is a milestone of my life as an English speaker. Although it was only a one-year-study-abroad experience, I managed to reach the level that enabled me to work at a charity shop, surrounded by local Nottinghamians. It is not hard to imagine that an English-only environment was certainly one of the most influential factors in my English development, but at the same time, there is certainly an affective complex consisting of motivation, anxiety, self-determination, or other unknown feelings that pushed me toward an "ideal L2 self". Since I started learning about various language teaching and learning theories in graduate school, I have encountered the field of learner development, including motivation, learner autonomy, and learner beliefs. These studies sparked memories of my learning experiences and encouraged me to become engaged in learner development.

My current job role also enhances my interest in learner development. I am an academic advisor in the Undergraduate Program at Temple University Japan. Academic advising, which may not be widely used in Japanese universities, is defined as "a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals" (Winston, Enders & Miller, 1983). Every advising session that I have with students is a discovery of new perspectives on their goals; by talking with them, I often find areas that, with encouragement, students may possibly get motivated to develop but which are normally dismissed by the students themselves. Hence, I believe the role advisors play have a huge impact in having students "realize their maximum educational potential" (Crockett, 1987). In addition to fostering students' motivation, academic advising also triggers students' active involvement in their learning. Rather than giving them unilateral instructions, I proactively try to include open-ended questions (e.g. "What would you like to do after graduation and what do you need to learn in order to accomplish your goal?") so that students reflect on their own thoughts on their future study plans. This active engagement certainly articulates "meaningful, long-lasting changes" (Angelo, 1993) in their attitude toward learning. These developmental aspects of advising should also apply to English learning, and I am hoping to integrate my advising experiences into learner development in English education in the near future.

I look forward to gaining lively ideas from you and I hope that the knowledge in my specialized area will also help you in your educational context.

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My English Learning History and Learner Development

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My interest in learner development firstly and clearly started to take shape when I got to know about language learning history as a research method while I was doing an MA TESOL course in England. I happened to come across *Exploring Learning Volume 5* (Murphey, 2006), which explored his university students' language learning histories as part of their course. This was intended to give the students an opportunity to share their experiences of learning and to find near peer role models for their further language learning. I found out the importance of learning about learning processes as part of language development, and I

also realized my further needs to research on this issue in my own teaching contexts. Since then, I have been fascinated with this approach. Language learning histories enable us to be close to language learners that we research, and to their learners' development process in language learning over time.

In my own case, when I recall my English learning, it was a long combat-like quest with English grammar. My first English learning experience was when I was in elementary school at a so-called *Eikaiwa* school or English conversation school. I liked going there every week since the activities were just like fun games and I had many friends close in age to me. At home, my parents played English song-and-story tapes (there were no CDs back then) every night as lullabies. I guess this strategy of my parents worked on me in some ways. So I somehow grew up to be a junior high student who believed 'How are you?' was a long single word. Later, I thought that my unbalanced English competence development in listening and grammar led to my feeling for a long time less motivated through my high school days. I just could not enjoy some of my high school grammar classes such as the teacher lecturing about 30 idioms in one lesson. Naturally I found myself to be a real false beginner by the time my university life started. Looking back on those days now, I kept studying English little by little though probably I was using unsuitable strategies for situations I faced as I kept failing to remotivate myself. After this, a number of great opportunities luckily helped me in recovering my learning motivation. Somehow I obtained teaching positions at English schools and have taught English for about eight years now. Exploring teaching and being with students is still full of enjoyment for me.

When a language learner develops their own learning, a learner is increasing awareness of themselves as a learner and also developing "... increasing willingness and ability to manage one's own learning" (Sheerin, 1997). From my own learning history, understanding and development, I have learned how these three components - learning awareness, willingness, and ability to manage my own learning - enhance language learning. This is why I would like to find out about some practical steps that assist and enhance learners in language learning. I am looking forward to seeing all the SIG members at get-togethers and conferences and to sharing ideas and experiences on any issues about learner development with you.

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"Language is the most human"

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I never wanted to become a language teacher at all, especially not a teacher of German, my mother tongue. I hated English because of the way my English teacher taught English. I cannot remember words easily by heart. I hate vocab tests. They really turned me off. I have to use expressions in order to remember them, so with French it was different. Living in a small town in southern Germany, we had sister cities in Belgium and France, and with many exchange activities, this was fun. Learning by doing, meeting people – pure interaction: French was never a problem for me. Reflecting on this with my linguistic knowledge from today, it might be obvious why I am trying hard to continuously improve as a teacher, and searching for many different ways to teach, seeking to understand the anxiety and the challenge of studying a language. Teaching German is the best way to learn it, even for me as a native speaker. The questions I get from my students are fabulous, a challenge to find an adequate answer - and even more challenging to include the answers in my teaching. And now I am using English to communicate with my colleagues, exchange ideas, and write this article to reach out to the lovely, open-minded people of JALT and the LD SIG. Something I would not have been able to imagine 40 years ago. In some way then I am grateful today that I had some instruction in English when I was

at school!

At university I did not follow our families' tradition of becoming engineers; rather I chose Philosophy for my Master's, and Comparative Linguistics for my Ph.D. Maybe around that time I really started to love languages, and my beliefs grew for that reason. Language is the most human part of us, language in a very broad sense. And living now in East Asia (South Korea, Okinawa, Kanto-Japan) for more than 20 years, I will add that language is culture, and culture is language.

It took me quite some effort to study Foreign Language Teaching and to teach German as a Foreign Language as I do now. Learning to teach is not done in a few days. My fields of interests in FLT are holistic, so-called alternative teaching methods, learning with all senses, not teaching but supporting the learning process, the teacher as a counselor, facilitator (in German "Lernberatung"), setting up group interaction in classroom, and often wondering why group-work does not have the benefits it could have in a country which seems to be a group-related culture. My more linguistic interests are to do with the phonetic part, with pronunciation, prosodic patterns, listening comprehension, as well as extensive listening, or how to visualize grammar, making written or spoken instructions fit different learning types. And recently I've been reflecting more on the cultural impact of language learning. On the one hand we have our individual style of learning as learners, and our own style of teaching as teachers. On the other hand, our individual style is embedded in our culture and we are constantly exposed to styles of other cultures. Our students do not study only English. They study other languages too, like German, French, Chinese, among others. Can we work together? How can these efforts bring a synergetic effect for their foreign languages and their own mother tongue?

Last but not least, I am hooked on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), with classroom diaries, can do's and learner autonomy, and questions to do with the transparency of teaching and learning. The reason why I joined the Learner Development SIG was the mini-conference at Gakushuin-University in November 2013, LD20. This was an amazing set of contributions, and it showed the wide range that teaching really can have in reaching out to students. I had a very good time there, and the LD SIG worked for me immediately. I am really looking forward, developing through teaching and developing my learning, by being part of this SIG with you.

Immersion Please!

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My experiences of language learning are eclectic. I am from the UK and have lived in six foreign countries throughout my life, starting at the age of nine. Altogether, I have learnt or attempted to learn French, German, Greek, Spanish, Thai, Lao, and Japanese.

I am fluent in both Thai and Lao without ever having studied them at all. I lived in Thailand for five years from 2003 to 2008, mostly teaching for the British Council in Chiang Mai. I lived and worked in Laos for four years from 2009 to 2013, teaching English to Laotian employees of an Australian-run mining company in order to speed up the localisation of expat roles. I'm sure my success in both of these languages is down to spending a vast amount of time working and socialising with locals. It has been incredibly rewarding for me to be able to use both of these languages. It has given me the opportunity to speak to members of hill tribes, Communist government employees, soldiers, police, elderly country folk, and all sorts of other characters about their lives and experiences. One woman told me how terrified she'd been when she was confronted by a tiger in the jungle when she was a little girl. Another told me of her experiences collecting frogs to eat while studying in the Ukraine and receiving strange looks from the locals on the bus home because her plastic bag was 'croaking'.

In contrast to the success and enjoyment I have had with Thai and Lao, I studied French at school and university in the UK for nine years. After all that time I still struggled to hold down a basic conversation in the boulangerie (= baker's). I always felt ill at ease when trying to pronounce words with a French accent and I was lacking in motivation, perhaps because France was just next door and I wanted to go to more exotic places. These days I have lost almost all of my French 'ability', but at least it allows me to understand some of what MC Solaar is rapping about.

Luckily, I think knowing any language of Latin origin helps towards learning a second Romance language. I learnt Spanish in Caracas in the classroom and by being immersed in the culture. After Thai, it seemed amazingly familiar; I could understand a large amount of words before I even began studying. I am far from fluent, but am happy with my level considering the short amount of time I spent on it. I only lived and taught in Venezuela for one mind-blowing year of dirty, dangerous cities contrasted by the most awesome natural beauty I have ever seen in a country.

Venezuela has two thousand miles of Caribbean coastline, the Andes range, Amazon-type tribes living near tributaries of the Orinoco River, and tabletop mountains which give birth to some of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world.

Out of all of these languages, I found Greek to be the most difficult to pick up. I worked for ten months with Greek Cypriots (on a Royal Air Force base during the Iraq War in 2003 but that's another story) and despite my efforts to learn some basic conversation, I came away knowing only about ten words. I think this was largely due to the fact that the Cypriots spoke English and liked the fact that they could communicate in a way that I was unable to understand.

One of the most notable conclusions that I have drawn from my experiences (and somewhat contrary to my career as an English teacher) is that for me personally, immersion is everything. I wouldn't want to attempt to learn a language without being surrounded by it. The effect this has on my teaching is that I attempt to make my lessons as communicative as possible and encourage students to seek opportunities to get as much input and interaction practice as they can both inside and outside the classroom. My most successful learners are those whose aim is to communicate meaning in English. For those who aim to produce perfect language every time, the topic of conversation often moves on, leaving them still trying to decide what to say.

I am currently studying Japanese. A cheeky technique that I am utilising, and which was useful for me in learning Spanish verb conjugations, is to write out new vocabulary onto a sheet of A4 paper, and stick it on the wall in front of the toilet. This way, despite my busy schedule, I still look at the words I am trying to memorise at least a couple of times a day. My students always giggle when I recommend this method to them!

Thank you for welcoming me into the Learner Development SIG. I hope to gain and also contribute practical ideas and techniques to help the development of autonomous learning with my students.

My journey towards joining the Learner Development SIG

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I have been working as a teacher in Japan for almost 15 years in a variety of settings, from classes in an English conversation school, teaching in junior and senior high school, and now in my current position in the Foreign Language Center at Tokai University. Throughout my teaching career I have often felt frustration with many of the institutional and curricular demands placed on my students in their particular classroom-based learning situations. These demands often seemed to negatively affect their motivation, attitudes and beliefs as language learners. As a result, I began to feel strongly drawn to issues of autonomy and learner development, in order to discover ways in which I could help my students fulfill their potential as language learners.

Perhaps the turning point in my exploration of these issues came when I joined the Aviation Department at J.F. Oberlin University as a teacher of academic English to pilot trainees on the Flight Operations Program. As a requirement of

beginning their flight training in New Zealand, all students have to attain a high score on the TOEFL test. However, due to the significant pressures of this high stakes test, the teachers of the course began to realize that many students were not able to effectively combine the skills needed to pass the test with the more general skills that would benefit their development as language learners and users of English. We perceived these skills as being of equal importance, so that our students would be able to work effectively in an overseas training environment. We therefore began to place much more emphasis on developing study skills and personal learning preferences in collaboration with the students, resulting in a flexible curriculum that encompasses much more than a solitary focus on test-taking instruction (Cookson, Marchand & Rowlett, 2011).

  I have since had the opportunity meet and discuss much about autonomy and learner development with experienced members of the Learner Development SIG and I have started to gain a clearer understanding of how other teachers approach these issues in their classes. Following on from these discussions, I decided to join the SIG and take part in the 20th anniversary conference in November last year with a poster session about collaborative learning in an English movie class. Talking with like-minded people at the conference really made me feel that I had arrived at a place where I could develop both professionally and personally. My only regret is that I didn't join the SIG sooner! Although I am planning to be away from the classroom for the next few years as I pursue my PhD studies overseas, I hope to remain an active member of the SIG and look forward to meeting, or possibly collaborating with, many more members in the future.

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Viewing low motivation and competence through a learner-development framework

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  Over the last couple of years I've become aware of just how necessary it is for us as teachers to be able to help our students become better learners. This is particularly true for teachers who, like me, spend a lot of time with low-proficiency low-motivation students. Becoming familiar with a few important aspects of learner development over the last few years has given me a much-needed framework through which to understand my students better, and, I think, to make classroom time more meaningful and valuable for their development as learners.

  I'm from Sydney, Australia, and before coming to Japan in 2008 I'd been teaching English to international students for several years already. My background had been in music, and in my mid-20s, after deciding I'd spent long enough teaching kids to whack drums, I set out, B.A. in English and Cultural Studies in hand, to get a proper job. Straight out of my Cambridge CELTA course in 2004, I somehow managed to land my first teaching job at the University of Western

Sydney, where I taught students from Thailand, China, Japan, Korea, and South America who were preparing for undergraduate courses in English. I had a real admiration for those students, who had travelled so far and committed so strongly to a really high ambition. It's no small deal to decide to undertake university study in a foreign country, let alone in a language in which you're less than proficient, so my students had clear goals that required a real dedication.

After the university unfortunately amalgamated their two language centres onto a campus far from where I lived, my next job was in an ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) college, again teaching highly motivated and committed international students in complete English immersion for twenty-odd classroom hours a week. The students, mostly in their early 20s, were from all over the world, and had come to Sydney to spend anything from a fortnight to a year studying the language, for various reasons; some for a 'gap year' or working holiday, some for credit towards their studies in their home country, some to acquire English for their future careers, some even to begin the process of migration.

During those years, the challenge for me as a teacher was meeting the students' expectations of rapid progress and the speedy development of real-world abilities with the language. You would have had a hard time convincing me that "student motivation" was something that was such a problem area for our profession - unmotivated language learners just didn't exist in my world! Students were hungry for opportunities to use their language skills, and class time often spilled over into weekend parties and hangouts. It was a great time for me, and many students from those years remain friends today.

Many of my colleagues in Sydney had begun teaching English in Asia or Europe, and had taken their skills back to Australia. I did it in reverse, finding myself with skills, experience, and qualifications (by that time, including an almost-completed M.Ed in TESOL) that were valuable around the world. I decided, at 30, to pack up my life and head out into the unknown, and after some deliberation, settled on Japan. Avoiding the bigger cities, I came to Fukuoka, where I've lived now for six years.

My experience and qualifications got me a part-time position at a university within a year of arriving. But wow - to call my first year of university teaching in Japan a "shock to the system" would be an enormous understatement. After all, I'd been teaching Japanese university students back in Sydney for years! I knew what I was doing! I headed off to the classroom with loads of good communicative activities, ready to meet the students, get to know them a little, answer all of their questions, and help them improve their fluency.

So why were these students so utterly unwilling to participate? Why did they appear stunned and embarrassed when I asked them basic conversational questions? Where was the six years of vocabulary that I was meant to be building on? Why did their homework, if they turned any in, represent little more than an attempt to discover how little effort they could get away with? Why weren't they retaining what we'd covered in previous weeks' classes? And WHY, at the end of the year, did they seem so blithely unconcerned that their English had barely improved despite the time and effort of 30 classes? I urgently needed a practical understanding of my students, their backgrounds and their actual motivations, if I was to have a hope of bringing anything of value to them each week.

Over the years, the answers to these sorts

of questions have come, to a large extent, from reading up on a few key areas of the literature relevant to learner development: firstly, self-efficacy theory, and secondly, language learning strategies/strategies-based instruction. Coming across these has been like turning on the lights in a dark room, and has dramatically changed my understanding of my students, made me more empathetic to their challenges and needs, and given me an angle on how to make their time in my classes valuable and rewarding.

For example - a few years ago I noticed that a lot of my students seemed convinced that they were irredeemably inept at learning vocabulary, and this low estimation of their own abilities seemed to be exactly what was preventing them from putting effort into vocabulary study: a classic vicious cycle of 'failure' breeding failure. To see if the cycle could be broken, I carried out a research project that first had them establish their self-efficacy in the area, and then over the course of a semester of learning, testing, and reflecting, hopefully would lead to them adjusting that estimation upwards. The project was arguably effective; confidence levels actually did rise, and it really got me interested in the theory and in figuring out how I could apply it beyond vocabulary learning. Reading about decades of other teachers' and researchers' successes, and the changes in autonomy and learning outcomes that can come about when self-efficacy and confidence problems are properly addressed, gave me something to focus on in the classroom beyond simply language-based content. Trying to teach over the top of low self-efficacy is a recipe for stress and frustration, but developing self-efficacy with awareness is an opportunity for potentially life-changing teaching.

My second area of research interest was piqued while reading for a project I carried out in 2013. I'd produced a video demonstration of myself using word cards to learn Japanese vocabulary, and I needed an understanding of why it had had such a remarkably positive impact on my students' confidence and enthusiasm, way beyond what I'd hoped. It turned out that I'd unwittingly carried out some effective *language learning strategy instruction*, right in line with the best recommendations in the literature going back several decades! In doing so, I'd stumbled across yet another framework for understanding my students and how best to help them! Looking at my students' behaviours in terms of language learning strategies, or frankly lack thereof, immediately answered a lot of questions. Of course I knew that low-competence, low-motivation students aren't necessarily *bad* or *inept* students; but reading about the strategies that are fundamental to language study, and noticing that many of my students were hopelessly unversed in them, gave me another angle on understanding and helping them. For example, many students arrive in my classroom with seemingly no knowledge of how to create mnemonic linkages, how to review well, how to plan and set goals for learning, or how compensate for knowledge gaps, let alone note-taking, summarising, or highlighting abilities. Whether or not it *should* after so much school language study, it falls to me to help them in these areas if I want to have an impact. Low motivation, something that our field is almost obsessively concerned about (probably rightly), begins to make sense in light of an understanding that our students have never been taught strategies for learning effectively. Their disengagement can come to be seen as a *logical result* of their lack of strategy knowledge and success, something we can get a handle on; and, potential solutions start to show up when we have an understanding of what fundamental skills our students need to learn most.

I've actually become excited to think about what might happen in future classes if I can effectively teach good *strategies* along with actual language *content*. Seeing the vast literature and all the research that's been done in the area has set out a game that I might actually be able to win, on a playing field that I finally understand - and given me a research focus that I'm enthusiastic about following up. In the coming academic year, I'm interested to see how effectively I can include some useful strategy instruction in every lesson, and I won't miss a chance to help students re-think any low self-efficacy estimations they might have.

Becoming aware of what's going on in these few areas of theory and research has really made me view my role differently, has helped me understand how to help my students become better learners, and given me a direction on how to possibly overcome those problems that seemed so insurmountable when I first came across them a few years ago.

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Learning From My Own Children

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I just joined Learner Development SIG at the end of last year. This is because both of my children started going to elementary school and I thought that I could spend a little more time for myself. Also since I finished obtaining my MA TESOL last year and started teaching again, I thought that I should learn more about teaching and learning through joining this SIG. Before becoming a mother I had been teaching at a private junior and senior high school after I had worked at a trading company for a few years. After I had my first child, I decided to take the MA TESOL at Teachers College Columbia University. However since I had another child, I wanted to focus on raising my own children and therefore I finished my Master's last year. Though it took about 10 years to finish it, I experienced a lot from my children and also came to think of my students from other perspectives.

Here is one of my episodes I recently had with my daughter. I think most of you have experienced this kind of situation in your classrooms. Teaching English also includes not only teaching but also collecting notebooks or checking vocabulary tests and other things. I am rather strict about due dates for submissions. I always tell my students "Don't forget to submit your notebooks by the due date." In fact, a few students don't hand in by the due date. So, I tell them "Be sure to bring it tomorrow." One reason

why I am a bit strict with my learners is that I also want my students to manage their time when they study. At the same time, as the proverb says, "Practice makes perfect". Though being just a little thing for the students, I believe each of these processes leads to their being successful with their goals.

One day, I was talking about this to my daughter because I wanted her to know the importance of being on time and also of managing her own schedule. Now this is what my daughter said to me. "Mom, don't be too strict with your students about the due date. Maybe, though she knew the schedule, she couldn't do it because she had to do other things that she really had to do. Or, she was too sleepy and tired that day that she didn't have time to do it." Her words made me realize that I was considering too much about the lesson plans and the curriculum from my teacher's point of view and I had forgotten about being generous to my students and about trying to respect students' autonomous learning. Maybe, I did not have the room for flexibility to think of the students' different situations. Even though my daughter is just a child, the ones really close to me can take an objective view of the mother. I really thank my children for being little teachers for me and helping me to pursue my career as a teacher and of course as a mother.