Reflective Writing on Learner Development: Introduction
学習者ディベロプメントに関する省察的ライティング：序論

This special issue of *Learning Learning* brings together nine short reflective articles by authors who presented at the Learner Development Forum on *Learner Transformation as Personal Maturation* at JALT2016 in November last year or at the informal afternoon conference *Creating Community: Learning Together 3* (CCLT3) held in December 2016 in Tokyo. Presenters were invited to write reflectively about their learner development work and research within about 2,500 words. Over three or four drafts a small team of editors worked in pairs with each writer on the reflective quality of their writing, encouraging writers to develop a personal voice, consider different perspectives on the topics explored, and take a questioning stance. Once finalised, a writer's article was shared with two reader responders who each wrote a response of approximately 500 words, connecting themes, contradictions, questions to their own learning, teaching, or research, and exploring relevant wider questions and puzzles to do with learner development. In this introduction, as the co-editors of this special issue, we look back at how we worked with the contributors to develop the reflective dimension of their writing. We also consider how our understandings of reflective writing about learner development changed through taking part in this project.

Before focusing on our approach to co-editing this special issue, we would like to share with you a story about the struggles and pressures that many people experience in writing and presenting about learner development issues.

A colleague was recently talking with one of us about writing about research and reflective writing. She mentioned she has a block about "academic writing" in general because it feels distant from her and from her interests as a teacher and as an "aficionado of learner development"—or teacher-learner focused on her students' development. She finds it hard to write "academically," but she is passionate about teaching and full of insights that she gains from talking with others about her students, their development, and how she is learning and also developing her practices as a teacher.

The colleague connected our discussion to how she has been changing her way of presenting about learner development issues in the last couple of years. At first her presentations were very linear and had a uni-direction, expressing a certain view of what she was presenting about. She then tried to bring in learner voices and learner perspectives to her presentations, so that she started representing the learner development issue from different perspectives—not just a single perspective as "teacher." Next she noticed various themes and issues interconnecting, but these could be interpreted from a range of perspectives, according to the "subject positions" that she introduced in her presentations and in her writing—herself as a teacher, as a researcher, as a learner, as a writer (who had been negatively evaluated in the past), as an activist (committed to social justice), and so on. She could also see different positions for her learners—as her students, as learners with histories of being educated in particular ways, as young women, as future citizens, as future productive members of society, and so on ...

This story made us aware of how thinking about learner development necessarily involves interdependence and mediation. Writing reflectively about learner development puzzles and issues may be closely linked to seeing anew one's own and others' experience, activity, interactions, ideological assumptions and positions, within different social worlds, systems, and arrangements of power. The story also lets us appreciate why it is helpful to

read and respond to writers' texts by moving to and fro between different "subject" positions so that we can discover new discursive spaces and reach deeper, more critical understandings.

In deciding to work on this project together, we each had different histories and perspectives about editing and responding to writers. These included:

Andy: *Having worked on the previous special issue of Learning Learning, I felt it was a shame that the co-editors hadn't talked more together as a group about what we were doing at the time. For different reasons, we had all been unusually busy, which restricted the opportunities for us to reflect on together what we did as editors. I wanted to develop further my understanding of responding to writers, so I thought that it would be good to aim, from the beginning, to develop a more explicit and interactive community of practice together with my co-editors.*

Dominic: *All too often in engaging with research, we only ever read the finished product. One of my goals in joining the other editors was to get a better insight into the processes that go into writing and thinking about learner development. Interacting with the writers and getting their responses helped me understand and appreciate how writing and editing is such a useful part of knowledge construction. Obviously, working online with writers and editors who have busy working lives presents some challenges to building up an ideal community of practice, but I think we have to be realistic about it. For me, the story above of a colleague struggling with writing "academically" encapsulates that idea—accepting some imperfections and including a variety of voices often produces better results.*

Sean: *There were two reasons why I decided to take the plunge into the editing pool. First, I felt that I could learn a great deal from my more experienced co-editors and get a behind the scenes look at how the editorial process for an English language teaching publication actually works. Next, I thought it would be insightful to examine accounts from front-line educators and this could help me enhance the learner development in my own teaching context.*

Trevor: *As someone relatively new to the field of research and reflective teaching, co-editing presented me a wonderful opportunity of seeing how other teachers fleshed out their classroom experiences and problems into a reflective piece. It was like being able to meet (virtually) with other teachers around the country who were in very different situations from my own, listen to what they considered very important to them professionally, and then help them to draw conclusions from their thoughts.*

At the start of working together, we used some simple guidelines that Arnold, Barfield, Murakami and Stewart (2016) developed while working on the previous special issue of *Learning Learning.* We initially thought that we should aim to encourage writers to try to make their articles include:

- the author's personal voice

- some sense of learning - both the students' and the author's

- a clear picture of the context in which the topic is explored

- an effort to understand the question/puzzle/issue from alternative perspectives

- a clear interest value (Does the article catch the reader's interest or not? Why?)

- a clear sense of audience (Does the article have a clear sense of audience, i.e., peers interested in learner development issues?)

We also agreed that writing reflectively might involve authors in raising (interesting and relevant) questions. For example, does the article interpret, problematize, or take a questioning stance about the learner development issue(s) it focuses on, rather than tending to be descriptive and distant? We were moreover concerned with guiding writers, in the closing part of their articles, to draw out key themes and pose new questions. This would, we believed, help to engender dialogue with the reader responders and the imagined readers of this special issue.

From the outset, we decided to work in pairs on writers' drafts and restrict our initial feedback to content and structure. On early drafts we would each try to limit our comments to three or four so that writers would be able to focus on particular areas of development in their writing. This limitation also enabled us as co-editors to learn from each other as we interacted with different writers. Following these guidelines, from February to May 2017, we corresponded with the writers, responding to their drafts and raising questions for them to consider.

Eight of the articles in this special issue of *Learning Learning* include two reader responses that take up issues of interest presented by a particular writer, including the development of learner autonomy through taking part in social networks, and an inquiry into how learner emotion impacts the development of communicative competence. The ninth article involves a written discussion about doing action research into learner autonomy and learner development. The interactive structuring of each article creates, we believe, a dialogic quality as well as a sense of shared exploration and questioning between writers and readers around specific learner development issues.

The first four articles come from the LD Forum at JALT2016, which had the theme of *Learner Transformation as Personal Maturation.* In the first article Yoshio Nakai (*reader responders*: Yukari Rutson-Griffiths and Huw Davies) explores how a Korean learner of Japanese develops learner autonomy and voice through taking part in social networks and constructing different situated identities for himself. In the following article Jim Ronald (*reader responders*: Elisa Acosta and Sarah Morikawa) reports on a project in which students learn about pragmatics, choose and teach a pragmatics topic to their peers, and reflect on their experiences, including the challenge of teaching itself. The third article by Hideo Kojima (*reader responders*: Shinobu Nakamura and Dominic Edsall) explores the possibilities for helping first-year English majors to develop their intercultural understanding through active learning in a flipped classroom. This is followed by Agnes Patko's (*reader responders*: Farrah Hasnain and Adrian Wagner) reflective account of setting up a bilingual correspondence project in which her students corresponded with students studying Japanese at a university in Hungary.

The next five articles bring together work by presenters at *Creating Community: Learning Together 3* (CCLT3). Nicole Gallagher (*reader responders*: Lee Arnold and Blair Barr) looks at learner emotion in a topic-based discussion class to explore the relationship between emotional awareness and communicative competence—and the role of empathy in the development of an emotional communicative competence. In the following article Koki Tomita (*reader responders*: Peter Joun and Sean Toland) reflects on an action research project that he carried out to address the challenges of teaching an English course for sports students. Reporting on an exploratory research project, Alex Shaitan (*reader responders*: Peter Collins and Martin Cater) then looks closely at different ways of providing feedback to student writers based on their needs, learning styles, preferences, and abilities. In the next

article Satchie Haga (*reader responders*: Maho Sano and Trevor Raichura) critically re-examines her own cultural ideological assumptions in relation to her students' worldviews and cultural expectations as she re-thinks how to promote learner intercultural communicative competence in English. This brings us to the final article, a reflective discussion by Tokiko Hori and Andrew Tweed about their experiences with action research (AR) and applying AR in order to understand and promote learner autonomy and development better.

Looking back in this introduction at our collaboration with different writers leads us to identify certain challenges that we faced and to recognize different insights that we came to over time.

> **Trevor:** *For me it was a challenge to think of the article completely from the writer's perspective, and then strike a balance between encouraging them to expand on what they had already explored, and challenging them to look at their reflections from different angles.*

> **Sean:** *Responding reflectively to a writer's work is definitely something that is much more difficult than it initially appears. Working with different authors and witnessing their ability to draw out more focused reflections from the first draft to the final product was truly inspiring.*

> **Dominic:** *Self-reflection is difficult enough, but responding reflectively to another person's writing is even more difficult. However, working together with the authors, it was really possible to sense the idea of writing as shared knowledge creation. I really appreciate the opportunity to have had this dialogue with the authors and know my own knowledge has increased as a result.*

> **Andy:** *I was intrigued by how we read the same drafts in different ways and came to make quite distinct comments to the same writer. This helped me question why we each made the comments that we did. I found on several occasions that if, early on in an article, a writer raises questions or uncertainties in a personal voice about what he or she is looking at, the rest of the article often has an intuitive flow in the way that it develops. I noticed that I tended to encourage some contributors to "narrativize" more in different places in their articles. In what different ways do teacher-researchers use narratives to reflect about learner development issues? How do we read such narratives? Why?*

Once the main articles were more or less completed, the next part in the editorial process was to provide some minimum guidance for the reader responders. We suggested they might see their reader response as an opportunity to connect themes, contradictions, questions from the short reflective article to themselves and their learning, teaching, or research. They might:

- use the opening few lines of their response to set up and structure what they will cover;

- make connections to their own work and experiences to do with learner development;

- "reflect away" from the writer's text to bring in other wider and sometimes unexpected perspectives;

- raise questions or identify issues to do with a particular concern about learner development or learner autonomy;

- focus on further (learner development?) puzzles for exploration.

The reader responders were invited to experiment and see what worked for their own reader response each time. Including reader responses has enabled a large number of SIG members to participate in this special issue who did not present at the Learner Development Forum or CCLT3 and who joined the Learner Development SIG in 2016.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the writers in this special issue for creating together a rich reflective and dialogic dimension across the whole collection. We also wish to learn from the Japanese editorial and translation team about their perspectives on this special issue:

> **Chika:** *The translation team (Yoko Sakurai, Yoshio Nakai, Koki Tomita, Tokiko Hori, and Chika Hayashi) were collaboratively involved in the developmental process of this special issue, and this created a community of learning for us also. Perhaps most teachers (especially Japanese teachers?) hesitate to share their personal experiences, feelings, and the problems they face. I have to admit that I myself was one of those teachers for a long time, but my turning point was 2012 when I engaged in a collaborative reflective dialogue with two other writers, Guy Modica and Yukiko Banno (Hayashi, Modica, & Banno, 2014). This empowered me and enabled me to reflect on the environment where I was born and raised, and the encounters I had had with various learners and teachers. I came to consider how all of them were interrelated and had affected me as a person, as well as a learner and teacher. Through that dialogic interaction, I embarked on a journey to trace my roots to my profession, as did Guy and Yukiko (I hope). Likewise, I believe the reflective dialogic structuring of this special issue, including the way the translation team has worked, has encouraged contributors not only to explore issues of learner development, but also to realise the importance of collaborating and developing new insights into our ongoing personal and professional development.*

We opened this introduction with the story of a Learner Development SIG member who struggles with academic writing. We described her as "passionate about teaching and full of insights that she gains from talking with others about her students, their development, and how she is learning and also developing her practices as a teacher." We could re-read that person's story as one of multi-engagement with learner development issues through dialogue, reflection, and writing. Similarly, from thinking over the multiple co-constructions of understanding that this special issue involves, we move again from narrative to inquiry and end by asking: *In what ways do these short reflective articles and reader responses, and the format that this issue takes, spark you to reflect, talk, and/ or write about what you are learning in your own teaching and what your learners are doing in their learning? Why?*

References

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Learning Learning

Our pre-publication deadline for putting together *Learning Learning 24*(3), the pre-conference issue, is 30 September. LL24(3) provides PanSIG 2017, JALTCALL 2017 and JALT International 2017 presenters a great opportunity to share their research and practice with members unable to attend this year's conferences. We also invite reflective articles from conference participants. What presentations made an impact on your understanding of learner development? Why? Did you return home with new ideas, puzzles, or research questions?

For more information, please see http://ld-sig.org/information-for-contributors/ or contact us at learninglearning.editor@gmail.com.
Many thanks and we look forward to working with you!