

## GETTING CONNECTED つながり求めて

### LOCAL GET-TOGETHER REPORTS

#### Kansai Get-together Report

Agnes Patko

**W**e have held our meetings every month at a community centre in Kyoto and provided continuous professional support to each other. Due to a new email communication system, we managed to inform all members of the SIG in the area about our activities. We had new participants almost every month in the spring semester.

After the very successful first Kansai to the World Conference in the Autumn of 2016, the group decided to organise the event again. This year it was held in June as the venue had already been booked by one of the SIG members for another event, which had been cancelled. As result, the rooms became available for us. Organising the student conference was much easier and quicker than last year. We received positive feedback from both presenters and participants of the conference. At JALT 2017, we had a meeting with the organisers of ILA2018 and decided that K2W3 will be held at ILA2018. It will hopefully attract a large number of presenters. Although there is obvious student interest, the Kansai group do not want to concentrate solely on event organisation.

The biggest challenge that we have been facing is attracting people to the get-togethers. Even though we get new participants, it is hard to keep them active. Compared to people in the Tokyo area, people in Kansai are less willing to take an hour or longer train ride to attend the get-togethers. Discussing current issues related to teaching does not seem to satisfy members. Also, discussions about the student conference during the get-together time may prevent a number of people from attending due to a lack of interest in the event.

We have been talking about joint research plans, but, owing to various factors, such as different teaching contexts and research interests, and inconsistent participation in meetings, we have not managed to make any concrete decision yet. Participants have expressed interest in holding mini-presentations or workshops in which they can introduce a classroom activity or report about their most recent research results. Having talked to the regular participants, I would like to propose that we meet bi-monthly with a set theme or agenda. To this end, we could send out a call for presentations and/or workshops at the beginning of the year.

#### Hiroshima 2017 Get-togethers

Jim Ronald

**T**he Hiroshima LD Get-togethers have been happening now for a decade or more, with some years of regular monthly meetings, and some of less regular—and also some where nothing happens. Apart from our looming Inter-university Scrabble Contest, 2017 has been a “nothing happened” year, at least this far. Maybe a fallow year in preparation for a bigger harvest next year? Or maybe a chance to think differently about how to do things? For example, being reminded at the JALT conference of the importance of workplace teacher groups, I wonder whether the local group might work well as a supporter, encourager of these at different schools or universities. Easier for many people to join, and ostensibly more relevant to many teachers, too? For me, over the decade of local LD Get-togethers, two benefits that stand out for me have been the building of friendships, and the opportunities for languaging—giving shape and purpose to fuzzy reflections. Certainly, the second could well work online—with a Facebook group, like the Kansai LD get-togethers, or similar. And the first through helping to foster workplace groups—and just

being more sociable? Looking forward to what we can do in 2018—and appreciating the support of Tokyo and Kansai Get-togethers!

## Tokyo Get-togethers: January-September 2017

Andy Barfield, Ian Hurrell and Jenny Morgan

With Ken Ikeda starting his sabbatical in California and after many years of holding the Tokyo Get-togethers at Otsuma Women's University, the get-togethers moved to Rikkyo University Ikebukuro campus from April 2017. Based on discussions and feedback from participants at the January and February get-togethers, we decided to move away from holding individual research-themed workshops of the previous year's get-togethers to focusing on building continuity between get-togethers by encouraging the creation of collaborative groups that would meet and discuss over several get-togethers with a mind to start a shared project at some point. Accordingly, we followed this structure in April, May, and June:

*14.00-14.15 Mingling and meeting in pairs*

*14.15-14.45 Talking about people's working contexts, research interests and goals; mini-poster making about their Learner Development interests*

*14.45-15.00 Sharing posters; finding possible connections for group discussion*

*15.00-15.15 Short break*

*15.15-16.45 Pair and small-group discussions exploring shared interests, puzzles, and possible collaborations/projects*

*16.45-17.00 Whole group reflection circle to share a brief summary of the focus of each group's discussion.*

To further encourage continuity between get-togethers we also decided to try out a new process for the post get-together write-ups.

Each group created their own Google Doc to record the content of their discussions and develop together a narrative of their collaboration that they might refer to from one get-together to another. Links to the groups' Google Docs are then published in the general write-up of the get-together on the LD website so that they can be viewed publicly (see <http://ld-sig.org/2017-tokyo-get-togethers/>).

The spring semester started with our **April get-together** attended by a dozen or so members at LD Tokyo's new venue at Rikkyo University Ikebukuro Campus. The theme of this first gathering was "*Beginnings: Ideas and Possibilities for Collaborative Learner Development Projects: Sharing Interests and Starting Questions.*" Attendees spent time sharing with new members about their teaching contexts, research interests, learner-teacher puzzles, and goals for attending the LD get-togethers, and as well as catching up with old friends since the winter break. Then, participants created and shared mini-posters summarizing our individual LD interests, challenge/puzzles, and goals looking for possible connections for collaboration.

This led to people splitting off into smaller interest groups that included: a motivational strategies group; a reflection group discussing reflective practices and processes in learner and teacher development; and a research analysis group for teachers who wanted to discuss their current personal research and writing projects. We ended this get-together with a commitment by group members to contribute to a short reflective report about their discussions to be shared on the LD website.

The **May get-together** was attended by a similar number of people, and had the theme of "*Explorations: Sharing Possibilities for Collaborative Learner Development Projects: Exploring Puzzles and Finding New Paths.*" We hoped that people would continue with the April interest groups, forming or re-forming other interest groups—the groups and projects are not fixed, and are always open to new people joining in. Groups discussed learner development projects they would like to do in collaboration with (an)other get-together participant(s). At that stage, we had

in mind the informal afternoon conference, *Creating Community: Learning Together 4*, tentatively proposed for December 2017. At the end of the May get-together, each group agreed to write up a report of their discussions using Google Docs. We also talked about keeping contact and momentum for our projects through to the next get-together in June.

A small but nonetheless lively group met for the **June get-together**: “*Progressions—Continuing with Our Interest Groups and Learner Development Issues*.” One member shared a specific presentation she was working on for a summer conference. Then, in response to a member’s question “What is learner development?” we launched into an extended discussion about different aspects of learner development processes and puzzles. An ongoing discussion and work in progress!

At the end of July, the Tokyo get-together coordination team (Andy, Ian, Jenny) met for reflection and discussion about the spring semester. We realise that while LD SIG members have a strong interest in discussing learner development issues, many are increasingly busy and find it hard to attend get-togethers regularly and there has been a noticeable drop off in attendance at the monthly get-togethers. This has made it difficult to cultivate collaboration and continuity between get-togethers, which is the primary purpose of the meetings. As a result, we decided to put on hold the December *CCLT4* informal afternoon conference.

At the time of writing this in early September we are looking forward to opening a discussion among LD members in the greater Tokyo area about how to re-energize participation in get-togethers or, indeed, whether to continue the get-togethers in 2018 or not. One alternative might be to move towards a blended approach for the get-togethers, for example, combining face-to-face get-togethers in the first few sessions of the year (say January, February, April, and May) with decentralised small-group meetings from May to September, and whole-group meetings in October and December. In the initial months of the year participants might

focus on identifying common issues of interest, discussing collaborative research and writing projects about learner development, and planning how to put their research ideas/puzzles/questions into action in the spring semester. Then, in the interim period from May to September/October, each collaborative group would meet decentrally to discuss the implementation of their research ideas, according to group members’ schedules, using online tools such as Skype and sometimes meeting face to face for a bite to eat and drink together, as and when people had space and time to do so. In the final period of the year “conventional” get-togethers in September and/or October would let groups start to consolidate their work with a view to sharing it publicly by the end of the year (December) or the start of the next (January).

- Would such a blended approach offer a way forward for 2018?
- Are there other approaches that you feel would be worth trying?
- How can the get-togethers be run so that they work for you?

We are looking forward to meeting with you and hearing your views or by email at <ldsigtokyogettogethers@gmail.com>.