

## MEMBERS' VOICES

### LDS SIGメンバー譚声

*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 new members of the Learner Development SIG in 2016 for sharing their voices with readers of *Learning Learning*. We hope other SIG members will also contribute their voices to the next issue of *Learning Learning*. If you are interested in doing so, please contact the Members' Voices coordinator, Andy Barfield, [barfield.andy@gmail.com](mailto:barfield.andy@gmail.com).

### “LDS SIGメンバーの声”

SIG会員の皆様に多様な形式・文体・長さで、ご自身の考えや活動を紹介していただくためスペースです。以下のような様々な声を募集しております。

- ・ ご自身の学習者および教育者としてプロフィール。(約 100-200 語)
- ・ ご自身の(語学)学習者として経験で、特定の段階における逸話の省察。(約 200-500 語)
- ・ ご自身の現在の取り組みおよび関心を寄せていることで、特に学習者ディベロプメント(また学習者オートノミー)に関するもの。(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内容の概要と方向性。(約 500-800 語)
  - ・ 勤務先の教育環境の紹介や学習者ディベロプメントに関する取り組み。(約 800-1200 語)
- ・ その他、学習者ディベロプメントに関する内容。

2016年学習者ディベロプメント研究部会に入会され、今号で『学習の学習』の読者に様々な声を共有していただいたSIG会員の皆様に感謝申し上げます。



## Why Do I Learn and Teach English?

*Mina Hirano*

Adjunct Lecturer, Nanzan University

**M**y path as an English learner somehow started in Mongolia when I was thirteen. It was my dream to visit there ever since I saw a picture of a Mongolian nomad boy, riding a horse in the ocean-like grassland under the blue sky. Until I visited there for a short homestay at a local traditional family's *ger* as my first trip abroad, I wasn't so happy about learning English at school. I wanted to study something really new to me such as Mongolian or Chinese, but I had to study the same language as everybody else due to the school system. However, when I encountered people with a different language and culture for the first time under the beautiful Mongolian blue sky, I was fascinated by communicating over and between different cultures and languages. The local people didn't speak English so I talked with them in broken Mongolian and a little Japanese, and, for some reason, I developed my English a little bit. At that point, my motivation towards learning English suddenly grew as I wished so hard, "I want to make friends all over the world! Therefore, I must learn English first!" That wish led me to study at a local high school in California for a year when I was 15 years old and at the University of Oregon for six months four years later.

My second turning point was when I went back to university after working for a while as an English tutor and also a caregiver for children with autistic behavior, in order to get a junior and senior high school English teacher's license. One professor asked, "Why do you want to teach English?"

I tried to explain how learning English broadened my perspective and the world so that I wanted my future students to be able

to have the same experience as me. He was not content with my answer and said, "You must find a concrete reason why you teach English that makes sense for every single student in Japan." Since then, I started to look for my answer to that question.

When I entered graduate school in 2014 to do a Master's in Linguistics, my learner identity broadened further and I started to explore the world of research using English. My first small qualitative research project was about English learners' identity. I never forget how one of my participants described her identity as an English learner. Although she was Japanese (an English teacher and also a graduate school student back then), I interviewed her in English. She commented, "Learning English broadened my personality and the way of thinking. It's like you have more colorful clothes in your dresser. Before you learn English, it was only white and black. But now I have colorful dresses in my dresser."

She told me that she used to be reserved and sometimes timid to express her opinions and feelings among Japanese people before she learned English. However, as she started to use English and made foreign friends, she realized that it is essential to show her thoughts and feelings when communicating with people in English. As she did this, she began to enjoy expressing herself in this way. At the same time, she could keep more reserved way of communication with her Japanese friends. It was fascinating for me to gain confirmation from another that that learning English could expand a learner's identity.

For my Master's dissertation, I investigated how and what kinds of assistance were provided between 16 low proficiency high school learners and their teacher in a natural EFL classroom setting, using a sociocultural framework. It was a 2-year case study, and my participants belonged to the bottom class of three English classes according to their proficiency levels. I wanted to explore what was happening in that class because even though the majority of the learners were having difficulty in learning generally

and some had learning disorders, there was a marked sense of mutual assistance and a family-like atmosphere between the people in that class. As a result, I found out that participant learners made up for their personal limitation of English proficiency and knowledge by collective scaffolding. For example, if one of the members of the small group didn't know how to solve English grammatical drills, one started to explain the grammar first, then, when that person was at a loss for words due to lack of knowledge or confidence, the other member naturally took over. And if the second explainer made a mistake while explaining, the third member would assist the explainer's self-correction. This kind of collective scaffolding was often triggered by the teacher's mediation, but how and when to assist each other depended on learners. Through this research study, I learned when and how learners can succeed in assisting to each other and how significant the teacher's role is to facilitate that happened. It was also a good opportunity for me to get to know my participants' version of the answer to the question, "Why do you study English?"

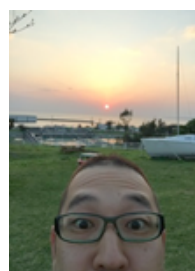
After I finished my master's degree, I started my career as an English lecturer at university last April. As I teach, I feel I really need to know the answer to that question, especially when I found out that the majority of my students have a sense of inferiority as English learners. And this question has also led me to my current research interest in learner's identity. I'd like to finish my long self-introduction (thank you so much for your time and patience!) by quoting Professor Noam Chomsky, who gave me a great hint to the question, "*Why do I teach English?*" I had the privilege to ask him this question when he gave a lecture at Sophia University in 2014. I asked Chomsky mainly about the role of language. Then he calmly and positively responded, "Language is like a hammer. You can use it to build a house, or hit somebody in the head. It depends on our determination."

So, why do I learn and teach English? For now, my answer to that question is to teach

learners that we learn and use language not simply to pursue a successful career, but also to construct a house where every person, with their different cultures, thoughts and colors, can live together harmoniously. I'm looking forward to hearing your answers as to why you also learn or teach English!

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## Do You Remember the First Time ...

Robb J.Y. Lee  
Hiroshima University

**A**loha and Han'oli kēia hui 'ana o kāna (It is pleasure to meet you). I was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. I am currently enrolled and working on my Master's degree in curriculum and education at Hiroshima University. It is a great pleasure and honor to be a new member of JALT and the Learner Development SIG and to also connect with all of you through Members' Voices. The reason why I joined JALT and the LD SIG is that it's my mission to learn about new teaching methodologies, technologies and new ways of think to education and English education in particular. As the saying goes, "Seek to understand, then to be understood."

If I may begin by asking you, do you remember the first time you saw the ocean? Do you remember the smell of the ocean or the sound of waves crashing on the shore? How about the feeling of fear and excitement as you were about to kick your slippers off and jump in? After a bit of hesitation and self-deliberation, you take the plunge and your brain begins firing and

creating new synapses to record this experience. You realize that the water is salty to your tongue, and that this vast body of water really is not a lake or river. It actually stretches way beyond the limits of your comprehension.

As a master's student at Hiroshima University's Graduate School of International Development and Economic Cooperation (IDEC), you could say that I have been blessed with the opportunity to meet amazing people from all over the globe. In a strange twist of fate, I crossed paths with such a gentleman from Rwanda as I was going to pick up my application for the University. I introduced myself to him and struck up a conversation about where he was from and why he was studying in Hiroshima. As we departed ways and said our goodbyes, I thought that this was the end of the encounter and I would never see him again. Not a week later, this fellow from Rwanda was standing in front of my house with my wife introducing him to my children and father-in-law. Oddly enough he was sent on a 1-2 day homestay with a Japanese family, and it happened to be with my family.

Life never ceases to amaze me and this was no exception. Fate literally brought him to my doorstep and two months later, we decided to take him to see and go swimming in the ocean for the very first time in his life. It was a very deep and powerful moment for the both of us because he had never seen the ocean before and I had never met someone his age who had never been in the ocean. We were beside ourselves with absolute joy and wonderment.

It reminded me of the little things we often take for granted in our busy world, that even the most mundane of experiences can lead us down the path of our greatest learning. Also, as teachers and educators, we have the responsibility to create the opportunities and conditions that facilitate learning for our students. We are the bridge that connects the educational needs of our students to the knowledge and experiences that lead to higher levels of self-discovery and learning.

Kolb succinctly noted in his proposal of the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) that:

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984).

In many ways, I am quite similar to my Rwandan friend in that I am immersing myself in the ocean of graduate studies at Hiroshima University. I hope to learn more in detail about international education in the context of Japan and the intercultural competency levels of domestic Japanese university students. My main research interest is in the area of intercultural exchanges that occur between domestic and international students and how these exchanges are transformative with regards to English ability and intercultural competency. I hope to meet, talk, learn and connect with you in the near future. Thank you very much and Mahalo Nui Loa.

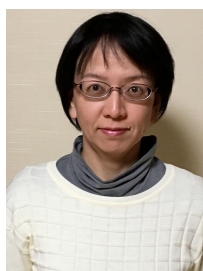
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**“Sensei, my major  
has nothing to do  
with English.”**

*Michiyo Masui*

Tohoku Bunka Gakuen  
University

**H**ello everyone. My name is Michiyo Masui. I've been working as an English teacher for nearly 20 years. I started teaching young learners aged from 3 to 12 and switched my teaching settings to university a few years later. Now I work for Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University in Sendai, Miyagi, and mainly teach “compulsory” English classes to non-English majors.

Many of my students study health services and rehabilitation and are hoping to work as nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and orthoptists in the future. The rest of the students make a special study of social sciences such as economics, politics, law and economics, etc. English is one of the liberal arts subjects that the students must take in their first year at the university.

Over the past few years, I've been having difficulty in dealing with students who have no willingness and interest towards learning English. They say things like:

- “English isn't important in my future career.”
- “It's fine not to be able to speak English in Japan.”
- “English isn't necessary to pass a nursing national exam.”

It is not easy to change their negative feelings and low self-confidence towards learning English, which have been developed over many years. In addition, the majority of my students stop taking English classes by the end of their junior year in order to start their job-related specialized studies. Sadly, some students and teachers claim that English should be an elective subject, and those students probably will not

take any elective English classes. Their decisions must be respected, but is learning English really a hindrance to becoming a properly qualified health professional?

Under these limited circumstances, studying English has to be meaningful for each student. I have been seeking for answers to the following questions: “What is my role as a university teacher?”, “What can I share with my students as a learner?”, and “How can I link the isolated English subject with other studies so that the students can continue studying English?”

I have not found robust answers to the questions, but I would like to tell my students that acquiring English will expand their opportunities and help them choose what they really want to do in the future. In order to come to more critical understanding of these issues, I joined the Learner Development SIG. I hope to gain new knowledge and ideas to develop my students' learner autonomy and look forward to meeting and talking with LD SIG members at conferences and other events in the future.

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## Perceived Self-Efficacy: Building the Confidence to Speak

Diane Jacob  
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A strong influence on the principles that guide my approach to teaching English is my own experience in learning and using languages. For many years, I studied French. When I was in the fourth grade, my mother enrolled me in an early morning, extracurricular French class, and I continued studying French up until I graduated university with a B.A. in French Language and Literature. However, for the majority of these years of study, I was unable to use it functionally. That is, until my third year of university when I enrolled in a study abroad program in Paris and was pushed to speak. From then on, I was able to make more sense of the relationship between form and meaning, and furthermore, I became more confident and motivated to learn. As a result of my own experiences with French, I am especially interested in encouraging students to put effort into speaking in their second language (L2). Be that as it may, I find that it is not always easy for students to produce speech. Various factors can influence a student's motivation and willingness to communicate. These factors include perceived self-efficacy, a construct related to self-confidence that I find has been influential in my own learning behavior and therefore could be applicable to my students as well.

Of course, I have not been the only person to notice the importance of output. In 1985, Merrill Swain observed that L2 students in French immersion programs, while highly fluent, were not developing a native-like speaking proficiency, despite receiving plenty of comprehensible input (Swain, 1985). She argued that students were unable to develop this proficiency because students were not required to produce language at

native-level complexity. According to Swain's (1995) output hypothesis, output serves three functions that shift focus from semantic processing to syntactic processing: *noticing*, *hypothesis-testing*, and *metalinguistic processing*. Output also serves to develop fluency, which is a characteristic of automaticity that supports a functional use of the L2.

In support of this theory, I have found that my language proficiency has developed as a result of producing meaningful output. For example, in a conversation with a Japanese colleague, I wanted to say, "*I think \_\_\_\_ is more \_\_\_\_ than \_\_\_\_*," but was unable to formulate the sentence. This prompted me to seek out the appropriate linguistic knowledge, whereupon learning the relevant forms, I proceeded to try my new knowledge in other conversations. As a result of this and other experiences, I have developed a functional use of Japanese, despite not having the time to devote to proper studying. The role that output plays in language development is therefore significant.

That being said, I still find that speaking often seems to be the language skill that L2 students struggle with the most. Output involves different, often less practiced cognitive processes than does processing input. Furthermore, speaking involves a higher risk of losing face. In the face of these difficulties, I have looked towards motivation to encourage students to continue in their efforts to speak. In my research into factors that can influence motivation, *perceived self-efficacy* has proven to be an interesting issue.

Bandura (1986) defined perceived self-efficacy (PSE) as a "set of self-referent judgments arrived at through cognitive processing of diverse sources of efficacy information" (p. 362). In other words, PSE is what an individual thinks he can or cannot do, regardless of actual ability. Learners form these beliefs based on *social-comparative information* ("He can do it, so can I?"), *social persuasion* ("You say I can do it? OK!"), *direct mastery experiences* ("I did it before, I can do it

again!”), and *physiological responses* (“I feel extremely anxious, I cannot do it!”). In L2 acquisition, these perceptions can influence whether or not students participate in positive learning behavior, such as willingly and earnestly participating in exercises designed to elicit meaningful speaking practice.

Although helping my students achieve a certain level of language proficiency is important, I have found that I should also consider the development of students’ perceived self-efficacy. I became interested in PSE through research into factors influencing students’ willingness to produce output; however, perceived self-efficacy is an important concept in many areas of L2 acquisition. I have heard a student say many times, “I’m just not good at languages.” Though this statement paints the issue in broad strokes, it stems from a low perception of self-efficacy. A final point that I would like to highlight about PSE is that it is task and domain specific. A student can have high speaking PSE when conversing with friends but have low speaking PSE when it comes to addressing the class as a whole. Also, a student can have high listening PSE but low speaking PSE. When a student claims not to be good at languages, it can be worthwhile to pinpoint the reason for this statement.

In sum, in order to encourage better learning habits and build motivation, I am interested in approaches that can positively influence students’ perceived self-efficacy. How a student perceives his or her competence can affect behavior and motivation. Furthermore, motivation, potentially more so than aptitude, can be a strong predictor for successful language development and acquisition. Therefore, I believe that PSE is a construct that warrants further research in how it relates to learner development in second language acquisition.

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## A Storm in a Booth - Learner Autonomy in Japanese and *eikaiwa*

Daniel Hooper

Hi everyone, my name is Daniel Hooper and I recently started working as a lecturer in the English Language Institute (ELI) at Kanda University of International Studies in April. I have been teaching in Japan for ten years with much of that time spent working in *eikaiwa* schools. I joined the Learner Development SIG last year and have found it to be a warm and welcoming group of people who are earnestly trying to foster student development. Hopefully this short story will serve as a cheery “hello” to other LD SIG members from someone who was greatly shaped by learner autonomy, and who later fought to promote it in *eikaiwa* schools.

I guess a decent metaphor for my initial relationship with language learning autonomy would be a driftwood raft in shark infested waters. It wasn’t pretty: shoddily put together and lacking

engineering know-how but sturdy and buoyant enough to stop me becoming lunch. Left to fend for myself in rural Saitama, my first foray into self-directed learning stemmed from necessity rather than any intellectual belief in concepts like “learner autonomy,” mainly because I wasn’t aware that such ideas existed. The attractive notion that I would simply “soak the language up over time” quickly evaporated as I met a number of other teachers who had been deftly evaded by Japanese competence despite living here for around a decade. Without any deliberate attempt to study the language many still needed to pull out the “look angry and speak loudly in English” approach whenever they encountered a communicative hurdle. At a diminutive 165 centimeters tall, I thought I had better prepare a backup plan to the intimidation card and so got out the textbooks.

But they weren’t really working for me.

Neither were online classes that I started taking in 2009, where essentially I was guided through another textbook filled with “textbooky” sentences of tennis games in the park, the exploits of “Taro” and “Ken,” and missed buses that failed to either stimulate me or take root in my brain. In the end, I felt I wasn’t getting enough bang for my buck and instead opted for the more economic option of a library card. I started borrowing children’s books on a range of topics (usually in the afternoon when kids were in school, as I felt less creepy as a 30-year-old man thumbing through books on dinosaurs and bullet trains). Reading books in Japanese was a valuable experience for me as it both increased my linguistic knowledge and allowed me to regain the childlike curiosity I felt as a kid in the village library where my mother worked, surrounded by unfamiliar and exciting words and pictures. These experiences motivated me to eventually strive to create more opportunities related to personalized and autonomous learning for my students in *eikaiwa*.

Later, as an *eikaiwa* instructor I was put in charge of the same textbooky language that had failed to invigorate my own language studies and began to see myself in the students who sat in the clinical-looking cubicles for the same 40-minute stretch each week. Just as with my experience, I failed in many cases to register any real linguistic development in students as they stumbled through the “Complaining at a hotel” role play that they had done eight times before, but would in all likelihood never have a use for outside of our grey little booth. Eventually, I began to offer graded readers to my students for out-of-class study. This was followed by spaced repetition flash card applications and websites featuring graded news articles. I was excited about my job for the first time in years.

But then... a blip. That was all. The students didn’t seem interested. But why? I had read all of the studies, attended the seminars, shown enthusiasm, and offered support. Why wouldn’t students want to use free materials? Weren’t they paying for classes? They should be motivated, shouldn’t they? I was desperate to understand. I read articles on everything I could find about *eikaiwa*, on Charisma Men (Bailey, 2007), educational fad-dieting (Sapunaru-Tamas & Tamas, 2012), and leisure and consumption (Kubota, 2011). I also was intrigued that other attempts to develop learner autonomy, much like mine, often fell disappointingly flat (Makino, 2016; Shigeo-Brown, 2005).

Since then, I have continued to push onwards in my mission of promoting out-of-class study in a world I feel constantly undulates between promise and futility. My relationship with the *eikaiwa* industry has been at times stormy, at times almost oppressively calm, but always with the hope that things can be better. The conversation school industry is, in many ways, almost untouched by academic inquiry. This is perhaps partly due to a lack of “researchers” working in *eikaiwa* and partly because of the bad “McEnglish” (McNeill, 2004) reputation that these schools have both deservedly and



undeservedly made for themselves. I see this both as an opportunity (selfishly as a researcher) and a desperate problem (as someone who watched students' money change hands week after week). The daily ups and downs of my *eikaiwa* classrooms as well as the research on *eikaiwa* that I discovered later in my career have often given me more questions to consider rather than settling old ones. *Eikaiwa* is a puzzle that I sometimes feel stubbornly does not want to be solved. However, over the years, I have met students who have inspired me and convinced me that they deserve better than "one size fits all." Maybe for that simple reason alone, I have grown to believe that the world of *eikaiwa* and the promotion of learner autonomy within it is something that deserves my time and effort in the years to come.

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## It's Good to Be the Jack

Mark Pileggi  
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What do the words *skateboarding*, *DJ*, *interpreting*, *Aikido*, *wedding pastor*, *surfing*, *Bikkurimark*, *father*, *associate professor*, *snowboarding*, and *MegaBikk* all have in common?

Well, I suppose the only answer could be, me. I was a happy child raised in a Christian home, the younger brother with a flair for adventure. A lack of focus on any one thing led me to try a little of everything. While I like team sports, I'm happiest riding sideways on any type of board. My studies were broad and *Bikkurimark* is my identity as a computer graphic designer, which is what I graduated from the University of Central Florida with, back in 1997. However, a love for interaction with people led me to become a teacher instead. From the Eastern seaboard of the United States to Japan as a JET working for MEXT I landed in Matsuyama, Ehime, right after university.

Living in Ehime was a great chance to learn Japanese, and, while studying the language, I also took up DJing, which began mostly to avoid keeping up with my best friend from

Ireland's drinking pace. Life in Ehime gave me time to learn written Japanese at work and long road trips with surfers not interested in learning English helped my spoken Japanese immensely. I got married to a lovely Japanese girl from Matsuyama, and we started out as newlyweds by moving to Osaka. I began helping at church and was interpreting there, I trained to get a minister's license and I also began marrying Japanese couples.

Why Japan? Well, I traced it back to being mugged for my candy as a child one Halloween in Massachusetts where I grew up. That was the reason for me wanting to learn martial arts to defend myself. It was the defining moment that my interest in Asia was born. That never went away, and I now have a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and a 3rd degree black belt in Aikido thanks to those misguided high school kids that attacked my older brother and myself.

While working at Osaka Gakuin University's I-Chat Lounge, I was able to take an online Master of Science in Education specialization in Curriculum, Instruction and Technology from Nova Southeastern University (NSU) in Florida. I now work at Kobe City College of Technology and teach English communication and TOEIC classes as a full-time associate professor full time. I love it there, and, while I'm not an engineer myself, all the brotherly bonding time spent playing video games growing up became valuable experiences that now allow me to hold friendly conversations on tech-related subjects and join students on occasion for online fun, usually under the alias of MegaBikk.

If there is a point to this chaotic story of mine, it's that no matter how trivial or seemingly negative an event or hobby may be to others, if you keep a positive way of thinking, all of those things can give you individuality and strengths in a combination that nobody else could duplicate. So to all the "Liberal Arts" majors out there, "*There is hope!*"

*Mark*

*Jack of all Trades*

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