

Creating ILA 2018 Together: Plans, Hopes and Reflections from the Conference Chairs

共に創る ILA 2018: 大会主催者の抱負

Whose Autonomy? Voices and Agency in Language Learning

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<<https://ila2018.org/>>

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Steve: Someone asked me why we chose this particular theme -- *Whose Autonomy? Voices and Agency in Language Learning* -- for ILA 2018. I actually find it easier to think in terms of how it came about. The three of us were tossing ideas around, sometime in early 2017 I think, and **voices** and **agency** were the two key words which leapt out and remained a central part of the conversation. For me, one particularly strong influence was Kelleen Toohey's chapter in the "parrot book" (Toohey, 2007), where she talks about learners as being "not agentic or autonomous on their own," but rather "that the social setting in which they participated both imposed constraints on, and enabled their agency." (p. 232)

For all three of us, I think, the voices of individual learners within the language learning process is an essential part of our own understanding of how the process works: how those voices, together with others (of other learners, teachers...), serve to exercise individual agency within their community/ies (be it the class, in self-access spaces, groups of friends, online groups...).

And I think/hope that's feeding into the kind of conference we're trying to put together. Not just in terms of the content of plenary and other sessions, but across the conference as a whole, in the way it's formed.

Hisako: Yes, and one of our missions as educators in this field is to encourage and help learners realize that they can be in touch with their feelings and emotions in their language learning process. --and to discover that their voices are their own precious resources that will help them reach their goals in self-fulfilling ways. We are looking forward to hear presentations that will touch on how teachers and advisors can support learners in classrooms, self-access environments, or in advising sessions to learn to hear their own voices and to apply their reflections into their actual language learning journeys.

Ann: One thing that has struck me as we have worked towards this conference (well, even before) has been that all three of us work in the same environment, with the same group of students, and are generally on the same page when we discuss issues in agency and voice in our daily learner-teacher community. This is positive in the sense that we don't always need to say much to be understood and move forward. The downside is that we might *assume* understanding by

others and in a sense lack the diversity of thought, opinion and action required to challenge ourselves in our own practices.

Organizing and hosting the conference has already been a great way for us to peek into others' ideas about the theme and for us to realize that it can be perceived quite differently. This, I think, is why it is so exciting to be able to bring everyone together under one roof. While it might be easy to work in a vacuum, the more challenging conversations can serve to stimulate and broaden our thoughts and actions, right?

Steve: Absolutely. And as we approach the conference, I can already feel there's a kind of to-ing and fro-ing going on between reaching out to others who'll be at the conference, hearing their voices; then reaching back in to make sense of what those voices offer in the context of our own learning/teaching environment; and then reaching back out again to see how we can empower voices and agency at the conference. Aside from the plenaries by James Lantolf and Jo Mynard, examples of this include: the plenary "dialogue" between Leena Karlsson and Chika Hayashi; interactive poster sessions; and *Video Voices* -- short videos of learners and practitioners around the globe (including some who may be unable to attend the conference in person).

There are workshops/symposia on developing learner voices and agency through Model United Nations, self-access learning in practice, fostering children's autonomy, and advising strategies. The programme also includes short papers and posters on agency/autonomy in self-access centres and in the classroom, motivation and autonomy/self-directedness, identity, reflection and journal writing, blogging, teletandem learning, peer reflective dialogues, teacher/student agency . . . and a wide range of other practices and issues.

We're particularly excited to be holding a parallel student conference on one of the days (open to all participants to observe), where students from different schools and universities have the opportunity to share their learning experiences, before presenting their insights to the main conference. There are still many details to work out, but the conference is taking shape week by week, and we invite you in September to add *your* voices to the shared experience of ILA 2018.

Reference

Toohy, K. (2007). Conclusion: Autonomy/agency through socio-cultural lenses. In A. Barfield and S. H. Brown (Eds.), *Reconstructing autonomy in language education: Inquiry and innovation* (pp. 231-42). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bios The three of us work together in the Department of English Language and Culture at Konan Women's University, the host for ILA 2018. Aside from our teaching responsibilities, we all act as learning advisors in e-space, the Department's self-access centre. **Hisako** is the current president of Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL). Her research interests include affect, affordances, and reflective dialogues. In addition to her teaching and advising duties, **Ann** coordinates the Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYLs) program and is active in primary teaching training programs in Japan and Nepal. Her current research interest centers on the impact of learner-centered practices on teacher beliefs and practices in other subject areas. Apart from being a (part-time) advisor, **Steve** is currently Director of the University's Center for External Affairs, responsible for study abroad programmes and visiting overseas students as well as domestic outreach programmes. His present research interests centre around learner agency and learners' imagined future selves.