

MEMBERS' VOICES | メンバーの声

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.

“メンバーの声”は、SIG会員の皆様が他の会員の皆様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。

Autonomous Learning Is Fun!



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Hello, I am Fuyu Terashima. I am currently working on my Master's degree at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. My primary interest is in pronunciation acquisition in second language learning, but I am also very much interested in autonomy, especially in terms of learning outside of class.

This interest stems mainly from my own experience as a learner. From the beginning of my English learning at the age of 12, I was fascinated by the wonders of language. It was intriguing how some strings of sound that are completely meaningless to me could be understood without effort by other people. I wanted to know how it would feel to

understand other languages and understand a language as well as I do Japanese, which is my first language. It did not have to be English, but this happened to be the language I was required to study, so I stuck with it. I decided that I want to master the language and learn how it would feel to be able to understand and produce English like a native speaker (which, unfortunately, turned out to be a longer quest than I thought or arguably an impossible kind of task, but that is another story).

Thus, my goal to become like a native speaker was a self-born desire, not something imposed upon me. As a means to the goal, I did not stick with the English class I had at school, which, at the time, was focused on grammar translation. Instead, I chose to seek out a large amount of input, both from listening and reading, because, as a high school student, I did not doubt that I could absorb and learn English if I was exposed to English long enough, just like a baby learns their mother tongue.

As for listening, I watched Japanese anime translated into English. I chose anime because I loved anime at the time, and did not mind watching the same anime over and over. This greatly helped with my pronunciation and listening skills. It also helped me with developing my vocabulary. Although I hated vocabulary tests where I had to memorize words that never really interested me, I just absorbed hundreds of English words that were important in the anime stories. The words I learned from anime never faded like the ones I mechanically tried to memorize in vocabulary books. I can still remember in what scene of

which anime I learned words like “investigate,” “arbitrary,” “grumble,” “particle,” and so on.... I sometimes wrote down new words and phrases that I learned. I also started to write down my favorite lines in English. Then, I started to recite them. I also kept records of the episodes to see how many episodes I had watched. By the time I took university entrance exams, I had watched over 700 episodes, which is equivalent to roughly 250 hours of input.

At the same time, I read loads of English books. Fortunately, my high school had a decent amount of English books and I could even request books. I referred to a book on extensive reading and learned how to do it properly. Then I read books after books, which helped me greatly with reading skills and again, vocabulary. My favorite series was Darren Shan, which I had read in Japanese in middle school to remember a rough outline and characters, but had conveniently forgotten the details of.

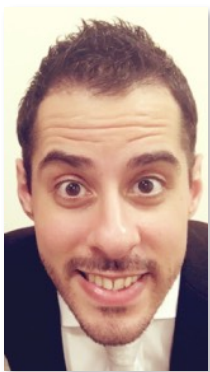
Then, I started to want to produce English. I had so much input, yet I had nowhere to practice producing the language. So, I started to talk to myself (mostly when I was alone). When I got the chance, I joined the English speaking club. I also started to write down comments for each anime episode I watched.

Looking back, I consider my case to be quite a successful experience of autonomous learning. I was in a very favorable learning environment. Not only did I have access to the materials and resources mentioned above, but there was a teacher at my high school, who helped me stay on course. He, surprisingly, liked anime too and was very supportive of my learning materials, sometimes giving advice. He also guided me with extensive reading. I

was dejected when I realized I had to give up reading Harry Potter because it was just too long and difficult, but he told me that Harry Potter was difficult even for him, which made me feel better and helped me go on with an easier book.

From this experience, I am interested in how research and teachers can encourage and assist learning through helping learners choose and learn with the materials that they find interesting. I myself, as a learner, greatly enjoyed learning through the materials that attracted me and I believe this kind of autonomous learning to be very effective. For one thing, I was able to receive a large amount of input while enjoying the materials. Learning the vocabulary was also very exciting and satisfying, because I knew I would probably encounter the same words in near future and because it felt like I was learning a new aspect of the things that I like. In addition, schematic knowledge I had and the occasionally available Japanese translation were helpful in understanding the materials. The biggest problem was that some materials turned out to be too difficult at one point. Especially at the beginning, I had to give up a few anime and book series, which left me rather frustrated. However, I believe teachers and research can guide and assist learners with the choice of materials.

I hope that many learners will be able to learn English through the materials they like, be it sports, food, travelling, or anime, enjoying the learning process, and that I can assist them in some way as well. In this SIG, I hope to learn more about learner autonomy and am looking forward to learning with all of you.



A Self-directed Journey of Many Destinations

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I was raised a bilingual, but nobody ever told me. It was only growing up that I realized that even my mamma did not know that I was picking up one language at home (Piedmontese, a small regional language that my grandparents used with me), and another one (Italian, the official language of my country) at school and with friends - not that I had many, but I had a Sega Mega Drive at home, and that did make me popular in the neighborhood. Mom never thought that she had been speaking two languages since childhood herself. For her it was just natural to communicate in 'one way' with her parents and grandparents, and in 'another way' with her friends and peers. I must have been about eight years old when I asked her why and how she did that - and I clearly remember her eyes moving up and to the left, as she paused and started thinking. I do not recall her answer, but the conversation must have influenced her choice of a birthday present for me. That year I received a *complete grammar of the Italian language and my first visual dictionary of English* (because ~~mom loved Duran Duran~~ British culture was 'the thing' in Italy in the 90s). Unusual as they might seem as birthday presents, those two beloved books introduced me to these elusive 'objects' called languages,

and the new wor(l)ds they granted me access to.

Never having been the social kind, I used to sit in my room and use the resources that I could find (with a strong preference for video games) to teach myself English first, and then French. To this day, I still have some bad song lyrics that I wrote when I was about 10 years old - my personal reminder of how it feels to be a beginner language learner. Starting middle school my two 'exotic friends' became compulsory subjects, so I briefly shifted my interest to learning Spanish on my own (in hindsight, that is when I learned that audiolingual courses were not for me) before I met, in middle school, my first true love. Its name was *lingua latina*. *La-ti-na: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps on the alveoli (...)* is what I like to believe a master second language learner like Vladimir Nabokov would have written to immortalize that first encounter. I, however, have no talent for writing, as my shaky attempts to translate Cicero made me realize. With time, the long afternoons spent doing declension drills and reviving the language of long-dead Roman poets as homework took their toll and strained our relationship. At that moment, I grew out of learning languages for fun, and started pursuing an alternative life goal involving human beings of the opposite sex.

They were very different people, but they both had something in common: German heritage... and zero interest in me. Then 16-years-old me thought learning German might have given me an edge (it did not) and chose German as the designated third language in high school. It was a life-changing choice. For the first time since my English learning days, I became enamored with a language not because

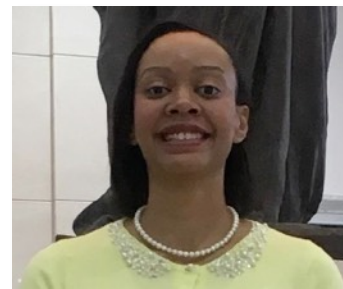
it was a code to unveil or a complex puzzle to figure out, but because it allowed me to appreciate more what I was already consuming in translation: literature, music, and movies. Choosing German as my major at the university was then a natural choice. In addition, I took the extra challenge of beginning Russian as my minor, with the teenage idea of studying abroad and using my 'I am an Italian with a Russian name' story as the ultimate pick-up strategy. While in hindsight obviously doomed to fail, the reason my plan did not go through was a strong personality clash with the class instructor. I have good memories of my Russian literature classes, but my relationship with the language was over after graduating. I never went to Russia, nor anywhere else during my BA and MA years.

And then came Japan. I first traveled here four years ago, after completing my Ph.D. in second language education. I was focusing on motivational strategies for language learning, and joining the Language Center at the University of Fukui seemed the perfect move to apply what I learned about self-motivation from my language learning journey(s), from research, and from playing video games A LOT (*long story...*) to a different cultural context. I made first contact with the local language and culture 'on site', experiencing language immersion for the first time. Despite it being the toughest language challenge of my life, it was the key to settling down that I needed at this point of my journey. Fast-forward four years and learning Japanese is still part of my daily routine, that I try to shake up by adding some Mandarin and Portuguese self-study.

As of today, I work at the School of Global and Community Studies where I advise students on self-directed language learning and teach

introductory linguistics and second language acquisition. I am also a founding member and coordinator of the university academic peer tutoring service. I believe the common thread to all my activities here is the focus on the individual and his or her development as an independent language learner. Recurrent themes in both my practice and research are: setting language learning goals, dealing with the ebbs and flows of motivation, keeping track of progress, and recognizing when (and whom and how) to ask for advice. I joined the LD SIG out of research interests, but I can already tell I will be staying for the people. I had the warmest of welcomes here, and I am looking forward to exchanging views with other SIG members and meeting you at the next event.

On the Path of Creating Value Through Learning



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My name is Paula Bailey and I am currently on the path towards completing my Masters Degree in TESOL as a graduate student at Soka University. As a new member of JALT and the LD SIG I look forward to deepening my understanding of learner development through reading the experiences of fellow SIG members and through dialogue. Two aspects of learner development which I am particularly interested in are language learning strategies and learner perceptions and beliefs. In my own

language learning history, when I raised my own awareness of learning strategies, such as memorizing vocabulary using the spaced repetition technique, I experienced a breakthrough in my self-study of Japanese. I am interested in seeing how Japanese learners of English who struggle with acquisition are able to experience their own breakthroughs by using different learning strategies. I am also curious as to whether or not there are certain strategies which learners prefer to use more than others and why. By being aware of such information I would hope to design courses for my future learners which take their needs into consideration where learning strategies are concerned (among other needs). Also, my personal belief as someone who intends to become a language educator is that the more I am aware of the learner perceptions and beliefs of my students, the more I can support them towards reaching their language learning goals in my classes. A key question I am seeking to answer is: If education is indeed a transformational process, what conditions are necessary and what can we do as language educators in order to guide language learners towards that transformation; towards the change in their perception which can enable them to experience a breakthrough in their language learning journey?

Furthermore, since my background is in animation (I hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Animation), a field I chose due to my appreciation of and passion for storytelling, how story-based activities can facilitate the development of learning strategies is a current research interest of mine. Through the use of stories or narratives, there is so much potential for students to comprehend language on a deeper level and retain what they learn as

well. For example, students can read stories while listening to them, learn how to tell a story in a conversation, and how to write their own stories. Through doing so, my hypothesis is that the learning of language can have more meaning for learners and their individuality can shine more in the process, becoming a valuable experience for them. Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of Soka University, once said, “Learning is the fundamental force that builds society and shapes an age. It nurtures and tempers the infinite potential latent in all of us, and it directs our energies toward the creation of values” (Ikeda, 2010). With this quote as a guiding light, I continue to believe wholeheartedly in the power of the learning experience to make a difference in the lives of my future students. In addition, in this learning centered community I anticipate hearing wonderful stories of how fellow members have witnessed the power of the learning experience creating positive results for their learners and for themselves as well.

On the end of the spectrum in which I fulfill the role as a language learner myself, the language I am focused on learning now is Japanese. Recalling where my language learning began, learning Japanese as an elementary school student in the United States was my first experience learning a new language. While I do not recall the details of every lesson I surely remember the anxiety I felt in the classroom towards speaking in the foreign language, trying my best to do so without making mistakes. Fast forward to 2011, when I decided I wanted to learn Japanese as a second language and thus began one-on-one lessons with a Japanese teacher. Since then I have experienced my share of breakthroughs and frustrations, but

fortunately, with all the literature on language learning that I have read as part of my studies in the TESOL program, I am aware of the action I can take towards developing my “second language self” and becoming a more confident speaker, reader, listener, writer, and even storyteller of Japanese. Thank you so much for reading my introduction, よろしくお願ひします、and I look forward to learning from you soon!

Reference

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To IB or not IB

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My teaching career came to an unexpected disruption after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. I had been teaching Music and Japanese for four years in a public high school in Melbourne, Australia. But heartbroken for the people of Tohoku, it wasn't long before I left my teaching post in Australia for Sendai, Japan - “just for a year”! After interning with a local church, I felt a strong connection with the city and its people, and fell into a job teaching at Sendai Ikuei Gakuen High School.

I had heard of the International Baccalaureate (IB) before, but knew very little about it, and never imagined the plans of this traditional Japanese high school to implement the IB, let alone that I would be entrusted with

the role of coordinating the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP). My school also made the decision to implement the Diploma Programme (DP) in 2015. The IB is an inquiry-based education which aims to develop internationally-minded and critically-thinking students. The Japanese government recently announced an initiative to increase the number of IB schools to 200 by 2020, in an effort to develop “*gurobaru jinzai*” (global human resources). The challenges associated with helping high school teachers who had only been familiar with a traditional didactic style of teaching, to transition to a constructivist pedagogy, or the cultural difficulties of leading as a westerner in a traditional Japanese organisation, seemed at times too great to overcome. However, in hindsight, the process has been as enriching as it has been challenging.

Having experienced Japanese high school first-hand as a student on a one-year cultural exchange in Kobe, I have a deep appreciation for Japanese education. It does a remarkable job of developing responsible, respectful and diligent citizens, but also tends not to cultivate critical and independent thinking. There have been many successes and failures. One of my biggest regrets is that we were not able to provide good pastoral support to the DP students as they struggled to cope with stress and anxiety due to the rigor of the programme. Furthermore, I also regret not having the structures in place to academically prepare students for the programme which resulted in a low pass rate. However, seeing the students develop into caring, thoughtful, and exemplary young people, and entering good universities to further pursue their interests and dreams has been incredibly rewarding.

After three years I have many more questions than answers: Have we been successful in achieving the aims of the programme? How can we measure such success? How can we preserve the unique cultural identity of Japanese education whilst implementing a programme with some conflicting philosophies? How can we effectively support teachers, in particular, in transitioning to a constructivist pedagogy? How can we educate the school community that test scores (*gakuryoku*) is not everything? Is there a correlation between the acquisition of our students' critical thinking and inquiry skills and their in-school test scores? Are our graduates who enter Japanese universities really benefiting from having studied IB if teaching and learning in the universities still often adhere to a transmission, memorisation-based view of knowing? To what extent are our students becoming internationally minded, and how can we measure this?

So here we stand, asking questions which are integral to our being able to enhance teaching and learning in our school, but which also threaten to quantify the 'elephant in the room' of some weaknesses we know exist, but we are not yet equipped to deal with. My colleague and I are preparing to conduct some initial research through comparing the results of IB students' in-school tests which are taken annually, to their counterparts who take traditionally-taught classes, so that we can examine the correlation between internal test results and IB education. We recognise that this particular style of testing is not necessarily the most accurate way to assess student learning, but nevertheless hope that it will provide an opportunity for discussion about how academic ability is defined and how it

should be assessed. The research plans and our hypotheses are still in their formative stages, however, through some action research to be undertaken throughout 2018, we expect to be able to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of the teaching and learning in our programmes, and provide some resources to be of help to similar schools.

Wish us luck!

Fostering Learner Development through Project Work for Japanese Nursing Students

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In teaching second-year nursing students, one of the puzzles that I face in supporting my students' learner development is how I can help them foster their autonomy. I'm interested in this question because I would like to support my students in enhancing and preserve their motivation during their fairly long process of the acquisition of English in a foreign language environment.

From the viewpoint of the educational psychological approach, Deci and Ryan proposed an empirically based theory of human motivation, development, and wellness called Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002a, 2002b). SDT is a comprehensive theory of human motivation, and hypothesis that three basic psychological needs (the need for relatedness, the need for autonomy, and the need for competence) are to be met in order to enhance human motivation (Deci &

Ryan, 1985, 2002a, 2002b). And among the three psychological needs, autonomy, which they use to refer to the state of being positively participating in determining one's own activities, is regarded to be more important than relatedness and competence under SDT. There are various ways for instructors to promote learners' autonomy. One way would be to provide learners opportunities to do project works and to give presentations on a topic of their own choice.

Last year, I had a class with 36 second-year students for nursing at a private university in Tokyo. The class was a mixed-gender class and had some returnee students. They took English classes twice a week as one of their compulsory subjects. We used a coursebook (Grice & Greenan, 2008a) for nursing published in overseas. In the previous year, they had English classes with a different Japanese instructor, and used the coursebook of the same series at a lower level. Most of my students seemed to have got used to use English in class to some extent.

After we had finished the first four units of the coursebook, I divided my students into nine groups of four according to their student identification numbers for a group project. I asked each group to choose and do further research on a topic related to the themes which we had covered in the coursebook by then. The themes we covered included "Admission by A&E", "Admission by referral", "Obstetrics" and "Pharmacy" (Grice & Greenan, 2008a). Since many of them will probably become nurses in the future, I thought it would be useful for them to practice to think ahead, develop their communication skills, and take an active role where they can.

Each group set their own objectives for their research, made a plan, and made their own short scenario in a real-life situation and acted out in front of the class. I scheduled only one koma or class (90 minutes) for my students to use for their preparation, and I think they continued working on their project after the class. My students searched for information mainly through books, journals, and the internet. I expected my students to develop their autonomy in English learning as well as deepen their understanding the nature of their future job.

One of the groups did research about "deaths from medical errors". The group members introduced and explained some examples of medical mistakes in the past. They also came up with their own idea for medical equipment which should reduce the chance for medical staff to use the wrong one by mistake. The group actually made equipment with their new design as a sample by their hands, and showed it to the class. The equipment was simply made by corrugated papers, but the visual aid was very effective to demonstrate how it works. Nevertheless, medical staff are human beings and medical errors are unfortunately inevitable. As we watched a presentation at TED Talks on a related topic, my students also discussed the necessity of establishing a new medical system where medical staff can talk about their mistakes with other staff. In such an environment, medical staff may be able to learn and find a better way to prevent the same mistakes from being made again.

Another group set a scene in A&E department of a hospital where there were several casualties at the same time. Members of the group played a different role: a

narrator, a nurse, and two casualties. Based on what they had studied previously in class about the triage categories, the student who played a role as a nurse actually tried to classify the patients appropriately one by one under time pressure. The group asked other groups to discuss their assessments and reasons. My students seemed to enjoy exchanging their views. One of them was concerned whether she could judge a triage classification appropriately when there was a member of her family among many other casualties in an emergency situation.

It was the first time for the students to do this kind of project in class. Though I did not see any major problems, some students tended to rely on returnee students in their group especially when they performed in front of the class. If there is another opportunity, I should be more careful about the way to divide students next time.

I believe that my role as an instructor is to provide learners with opportunities to empower them to steer themselves through their learner development processes. Those learners who enjoy the freedom of choosing what they have an interest with, understood what they need to strive for with their classmates, managed their time, energy and desires for their study, their motivation for learning probably will be sustained outside class and maintain even after they have finished their studies at universities.

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Shaking Things Up

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At Sojo University in Kumamoto, we recently celebrated the opening of a new International Learning Center whilst solemnly observing the two-year anniversary of the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquakes. The quakes and their aftershocks, which numbered at over 4000 in the first year and continue to this day, displaced tens of thousands and disrupted life for everyone in the region. Today, as I sit in my newly finished office, two floors up from the very spot I began teaching at university in Japan four years ago, I reflect on the ways in which my own life was disrupted, and how shaking things up positively impacted my development as a learner of Japanese culture.



Demolition of the
Sojo International Learning Center

We've all heard (and probably at some point thought) that Japanese organizations are heavily bureaucratic and slow to adopt and enact change. What I saw in and around my university in the months that followed the quakes stood as a stark contrast to this stereotype. Once people had established a level of relative safety following the quakes, the phrase "Ganbatte Kumamoto" could be seen virtually everywhere: painted onto makeshift retaining walls, scribbled on towels, and later plastered onto city busses and even printed onto onigiri wrappers sold in convenience stores. This rallying cry ran deep within the heart of the city and its people. Rebuilding was not a term thrown around lightly, and reconstruction began almost immediately. For the first time in the four years I'd been living in Japan, I discovered firsthand that this is a country of spirit and resilience, populated by a people familiar with the laborious task of rebuilding.

Staff and faculty worked tirelessly to sort out the logistics of keeping school in session as quickly as possible. Unused offices and storage areas were converted into makeshift offices and classrooms to accommodate for the

building that had housed the English department. In just days our entire self-access learning center was moved into the main library, whose staff welcomed us warmly, as if providing shelter to the homeless. Somehow, after only a few short weeks, classes were in session and students were back at it despite it all.

For two years, students and teachers alike carried on under difficult circumstances. Scaffolding was erected all around us, and the sights and sounds of construction became the new normal. Jackhammers stripped cracked exterior tiles off the walls of the very rooms we were teaching in. But everyone soldiered on with very little complaint. University administration was pleased to discover that admissions did not drop off following the quake, and that students continued their studies diligently.



A new SILC

While it is important to recognize the fact that this institution is a private organization and the argument can be made that business executives were simply scrambling to stave off losses and prevent an important arm of the corporation from being severed, my firsthand experience undermines this theory and instead

leads to the image of solidarity through strife. For instance, just days after the main shock hit, my wife and I were visited by one of the university's property managers bearing potable water, who seemed much less interested in the state of the house than he was in our physical and emotional well-being.

It's easy to understand that learning something big—a language, a culture, a people, a way of life—takes time. Because of this, it's just as easy to plateau and become stagnant in one's development. On occasion, a drastic change can be good for the development process. It opens new doors and offers new perspectives which force us to grapple with inconsistencies in our awareness and understanding. Sometimes we must even reevaluate the ways in which we participate in and relate to the community of people around us. For myself, I was forced to acknowledge the conflict between the stereotypical perspective I'd given in to and what I saw around me in the months follow the earthquakes. Amongst all the damage and destruction, one small aftereffect of the quake was that this learner was able to shake off a crusted image of Japanese culture, and in its place nurture a fresh sense of appreciation of people at their best: united, determined, and resolved to preserve their way of life.



Selfie of Branden and his wife Chiharu



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