

## 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.

“メンバー声”、SIG 会員皆様が他会員皆さんに向けて多様な形式・文体・長さで、ご自身考えや活動をご紹介していただくためスペースです。例え、以下のような様々な声を歓迎しています。

### Reflecting on Motivation and Autonomy

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Like many people raised in the UK, I studied foreign languages at high school. In my case, those two languages were French and Spanish, although the experience of studying them couldn't have been more different.

In French, we were given lists of vocabulary to translate and remember, coupled with terribly exciting tables full of verb conjugations. Our experience of speaking the language was mainly restricted to listen and repeat exercises, and our teacher(s) mainly spoke English. As a result, I have forgotten most of the French I studied, even though I spent time in France and was a huge fan of French films. We were told that if we studied hard we could get a good grade, and knowing a foreign language would be good for our careers.

In Spanish, we were first given some facts about Spain. This included listening to Spanish music, watching clips of Spanish TV shows, and having real-life Spanish people come into our class. The lessons were almost entirely in Spanish, and

we learned greetings and much more without even realizing we were studying them. We were encouraged to experiment with the language, and think of things we really wanted to talk and write about. We ate Spanish food, celebrated Spanish festivals, and learned that Spanish wasn't just spoken in Spain, but around the world. It became clear that if we learned Spanish, we could effectively double our chances of making ourselves understood in many places, and therefore greatly improve our experience. We learned that it wasn't just a language, but a door to many people, cultures, and countries. Unfortunately, I only studied Spanish for two years in high school, but I retained more than from my five years of French.

The approaches to teaching and learner development were not only like night and day in terms of style and content, but also in terms of motivation and autonomy. In French, the motivating factor was clear: get a good grade and maybe get a good job (a little premature for a bunch of 13-year-olds, but there you go). In other words, our motivation was purely extrinsic. Autonomy was almost non-existent. We simply remembered and repeated. In Spanish, the motivating factors were not so expressly stated, and were more for us to decide for ourselves. The motivation was therefore far more intrinsic, only amplified by our being encouraged to make the language more personal.

Looking back, it's clear that experiences like these have shaped my own approach to teaching, and go a long way to explaining why my interests lie in learner motivation, learner autonomy, educational design, and educational psychology. Yet it was only when I began my career as a teacher that I really began to reflect on my own education. Although my first two teaching positions were teaching law, language teaching in Japan, first in an English school (eikaiwa) and subsequently in public and private schools, often jolted my memories back to high school.

Such memories came fully to the fore while I was working as an elementary school Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Chiba. Almost immediately I noticed that the lessons I was being asked to teach didn't link, had no determinable goal, and merely centred around a nebulous idea of being 'fun'. So I started engaging the students, and asking them what they were interested in. I took note of the questions they were asking me, and their reactions to certain answers and topics. These kids were young but they certainly weren't stupid, and it upset me that many people were so keen to dismiss them as just wanting to play games. What I found was that the students were very keen to learn, but in many cases they just hadn't been given the material or opportunity.

I began researching and finding things they had in common, things they were studying in other subjects, their learning styles, their interests, and much more. I spoke to teachers both in elementary school and junior high school, wanting to learn more from their experience and interaction with students. Within a year, I was putting together a mini 'curriculum' with lessons that connected both in language and themes. The problem was that I rotated between five schools, so it was hard to maintain the momentum when I might only visit a school for a couple of weeks once a semester. To overcome this, I submitted a plan to the Board of Education to create an English curriculum for 5th and 6th grade students, which was immediately accepted.

For the following two years I researched, designed, co-wrote and developed a full, tailor-made English curriculum for elementary schools in the city I was working in, which the city introduced in 2013. We conducted a needs analysis which took into account the location, students' needs and levels, teachers' needs and levels, usability, developmental levels, transition from elementary school to junior high school, CEFR-J levels, and more. Thematically, it included many suggestions from students and teachers, including talking about the local area, hobbies, club activities, their likes and dislikes, Japanese culture, and more. The language built naturally and incrementally, and

included speaking, listening, reading and writing. It was great to see the reaction not only from the students, but also from the teachers we consulted who saw their ideas and suggestions reflected in the materials. It was great to see students being able to connect with the language because they could relate to the content.

I continue to develop learning materials, and I am continuing to pursue research into learner motivation, learner autonomy, educational design, and educational psychology. I look forward to interacting with everyone in the LD SIG!

## Finding a Better Way for High School Students in Japan



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My name is Miki Iwamoto and I am currently working on my master's degree in TESOL at Temple University. I am also now working at a public high school in Hyogo prefecture. I started teaching English at high school nine years ago. Since I started working as a high school teacher, and because teaching is a very busy job, I have realized that it is difficult to make time for studying and improving my teaching skills and have felt the gap between what I want to teach and what students need.

In my classes I want my students to expand their knowledge and world view by learning a second language. This idea is from my experience as a student. When I was at high school myself, I learned English only through intensive reading and grammar translation methods: I did not like English lessons because there was only one answer and students were nervous about making mistakes. However, because I was interested in learning about other cultures, I chose to study international

relations at university. While studying international relations, I had opportunities to gather informations for class and I realized I could get more information by reading through articles or searching the Internet in English. To collect the information, I needed to use English and this was the first time I used English as a tool for gathering the information, not for studying English itself. In addition, when I studied in Australia for one year in university, I realized that what I want to tell is important and English is just a tool for conveying my thoughts, feelings and ideas. From these experience in the university and studying abroad, I realized that English is a tool for acquiring knowledge and I could understand the need for not only learning English, but also using it in English classes at school and university. Since then, I have believed that the accuracy of English is not as important as communicating effectively. I also hope this way of thinking can decrease my learners' anxiety about making mistakes. Therefore, I always tell my students not to focus on the accuracy of their English too much and explain that using language for their own purpose is important. To have students put this into practice for themselves, I try to increase the opportunities for them to express their own ideas in English in my classes, and encourage them not to be scared of making mistakes.

However, as a high school teacher, I need to understand the ultimate goal of teaching English in this context is to improve students' scores on university entrance examinations and that is what students need, too. Even though language teaching is highly dependent on the school curriculum and the teacher's approach, acquisition of a second language depends on the learners' interest and motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). For instance, even though I want to encourage my students to focus on expressing their thinking in English and not excessively worry about grammatical mistakes too much, there is a strong need from my students themselves to work on English grammar or vocabulary for preparing the entrance examinations. Therefore, students tend to spend more time to study grammar or vocabulary rather than speaking or writing. This can be boring and

students may become scared of making mistakes as well as lose their motivation, but it is difficult to change my students' needs because they will need the knowledge to pass the university entrance examinations.

I have been trying to find an effective way to solve these problems by attending seminars for high school teachers and sharing these difficulties with other high school teachers. In the seminars, I felt relieved when I found out that other teachers have similar problems and because I could share the difficulty of teaching English for the entrance examinations, but I also realized that I was lack of learning about education and teaching English. I could learn some effective and interesting activities in the seminars, but I neither understood why these activities are effective for students nor how to develop my own way of teaching further. From this experience in the seminar, I felt that I need to study about teaching English from the beginning.

From last fall, I started a master's program of TESOL and joined JALT to find effective ways to teach high school students and understand learner development more fully. For now, I have started understanding English education theoretically and practically. For example, I have understood that there are method and theories to approach teaching English based on empirical research, and I can consider which method or theories are effective to my students and my teaching context. Learning about TESOL has changed my perception of teaching. I also have more confidence in what I am doing in my lessons because now I understand the effectiveness of activities and can tell my students why we focus on them in the lesson. I am excited to improve my teaching style more and see the reaction of my students toward English classes, especially how their motivation to English may change with some activities. Since this school year, I have introduced shadowing and dictation in my lessons. Against my expectations, students have remained confused and not that motivated very much, but I hope I can increase their motivation by improving how I introduce these activities and explain their

effectiveness. For now, I am interested in learners' motivation and autonomy to learn language. I want my students to become motivated to learn English and try to study English outside of school, too. I am looking forward to learning more from taking part in the Learner Development SIG and meeting other SIG members.

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## Reflecting on Reflecting



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A few years ago, while teaching in Hong Kong, I was asked to deliver some workshops on Analytical Reading. In order to graduate, all students were required to pass a course which required them to read important texts across many fields and then write a number of essays. This might seem a wonderful way in which to broaden students' minds, but the sad truth was that the majority of students found many of the texts extremely difficult to comprehend, let alone write a worthwhile commentary about. (And in truth, I wonder how many undergraduates today at universities in countries where English is the mother tongue would be able to write something cogent and meaningful about Plato, Darwin, Hume, or others.)

In any case, a meeting was held after the first workshop and comments invited from those professors and lecturers responsible for delivering this course. Their comments were favourable overall, but the one that most struck me was made by one of the senior professors, who said that what most impressed him was the fact that I had advised students to always ask questions about what they were reading; to be active readers, in other words, rather than passive.

I was glad he was glad I had made this point, but at the same time, it remains inconceivable to me that any student at a supposedly well-reputed university anywhere in the world should need to be told this.

Picture, if you will, a classroom in the United Kingdom in the 1960s. The room is full of children, aged about five or six. They are in Form 2. The headmaster of the school walks in one afternoon, excuses himself, and asks the teacher if he may address the class for a few minutes. It turns out to be about twenty. During this time he explains the importance of education, and exhorts us, as young adults, to do our best. Then, towards the end of his talk, he wrote one single word on the blackboard: *believe*.

Then told us not to believe everything we were told, not to believe everything we read in books or newspapers, not to believe everything we saw on TV or at the movies (and today, of course, the Internet would have been at the top of the list!). Why?

And then he drew a circle around the three letters in the middle.

Because, he continued, people will often lie to you. Or tell you half-truths. Or they will twist the truth. So it is important that you think for yourself.

As far as I was concerned, this was not news. I was already a long-time convert. My father had told me before I even entered school, at the age of 4½, not to blindly follow everyone else, but to think for myself. Furthermore, this same mantra was intoned by many of my teachers throughout my school years. And it has stood me well, both as a student and in other aspects of my life. (And no, I won't bore you with examples!)

For me this is educational bedrock. The very foundation and purpose of a good, meaningful education. And yet I worry about today. For around the world, in far too many countries and institutions, there seems to be a growing focus on scores. Education, now, is a business. Students are customers, and as such need to be satisfied and



placated. Gaining an education, particularly at university, is increasingly costly, and to keep these "customers" flocking they need to be made to feel that they are getting value for money - or at least what they perceive to be value for money. And that means scores. Good scores. Great scores!

And so the focus is on tests. Anything not directly connected with the coming assessment is spurned. You want to teach me how to think for myself? Forget it. Just tell me what to do! How to get top marks!!

And so pedagogically driven teachers, or at least those who are still around, can often find themselves in a quandary. Do they just put up and shut up, knowing that they are failing their students (even if their charges are singularly unaware of this fact, and would probably not be the least concerned if they were aware)? In turn these less than optimally educated students will often fail to meet the requirements and desires of employers, and in this and other ways will ultimately fail their respective societies.

Though in looking at what is happening around the world today, perhaps this is precisely what our countries' leaders want. If not, then why would education be so chronically underfunded, and institutions forced to adopt business models in the first place?

I am so glad I was educated when and where I was.

## A Brief Reflection on My Initial English Learning Years

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Growing up in British colonized Hong Kong did not automatically mean that I was a proficient English speaker. Children in countries like Singapore, where bilingualism was made into official policy from the 1960s, were required to learn English and their mother tongue, such as Mandarin or Bahasa Malay (National Library Board Singapore, 2016). Children in Hong Kong, who are predominantly Cantonese speakers like myself, are not required to learn English, and only private schools and the top public schools provide sufficient English lessons (Sheung, 2014). This means that the majority of the Hongkongers, especially those who attend public schools, do not reach high English proficiency, because English is treated as a subject and not used in other classes. I myself was an example of this, as I had learned some basic English in kindergarten and the 1st grade, but seldom used English outside of class. So, it was no surprise that I was unprepared to attend regular 2nd grade classes in English when I arrived in Melbourne, Australia, at the age of 7. I was initially accepted into a 2nd grade class at a local school in my neighborhood, but was placed in 1st grade after the first day, because I was barely able to understand my teacher. I was referred to a nearby ESL school within 2 weeks and spent the next 6 months there. It was through some kind of critical age magic that I was able to reach minimal proficiency to get back on track after those 6 months. The subsequent two years of immersive education in English were formative years that helped shape my learner beliefs about education, and retrospectively showing me the importance of having near-peer role models (Murphey, 1995).

I attended class with European and Asian students who did not speak the same L1 at the ESL school, which meant that we had to communicate in our shared L2, English. This gave us opportunities to develop our L2 abilities through trial and error, fostering our self-efficacy and language learning beliefs. Having the same low L2 proficiency as my classmates and seeing perceptible progress in my English acquisition helped me maintain a positive outlook on my language abilities. This is a crucial factor for language learning success according to Kondo-Brown (2006) and Mori (1999). Culturally, as a Hongkonger, I was a believer in discipline, hard work and not relying on talent, so I had a growth mindset and was not afraid to make mistakes (Dweck, 2006). Although I was mostly introverted, gaining more vocabulary turned nerve-racking activities such as show-and-tell into enjoyable experiences, as they were good opportunities for me to use my newfound knowledge. My increased proficiency and the acknowledgement from my teacher and peers helped me gain more self-efficacy, and I became more willing to use English outside of class. Being able to leave the ESL school in 6 months was the confidence booster I needed, and was probably what helped tie the idea of persistence to achievability for me. My proficiency level was still only at the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) B1 level after 2 years, so I had issues with English composition and lacked the vocabulary to be an advanced English user in middle school. However, when I returned to Hong Kong and continued my education at an American international school, I realized it was not so different from my experience in Australia and I would be able to make progress in language learning as long as I worked hard and persisted. I was required by my school to attend an elective ESL course for the first 6 months, but using English came naturally by that point. It probably took me until high school to reach native-like proficiency, but because all my courses were taught in English, my language learning experience progressed much more naturally compared to ESL or EFL learning. Looking back now, I had the type of mindset that

Dweck (2006) described as potentially leading to language learning success.

With my willingness to work hard and persist, I was also motivated to get back into a 'normal' class by two individuals who I could call my near-peer role models. One role model was the son of our coincidental Hong Kong neighbor, who was almost the same age as me. He had studied in Australia for only a few years and was seemingly speaking English proficiently with an Australian accent. He was the perfect example of success in language acquisition to me and was the same age, gender and ethnicity as myself (Murphey & Arao, 2001). The second role model was my mother, who put a lot of effort into studying English during her high school days to be a cabin attendant. She had a higher English competency compared to my father, which meant that she was usually the parent who socialized with the English-speaking neighbors and friends. According to Murphey and Arao (2001), children often learn from the people closest to them, such as parents, relatives and friends, and develop efficacy beliefs from observing other people's accomplishments. The examples of successful language learning that I saw in these people helped strengthen my growth mindset and reinforced the notion that English acquisition was achievable through hard work and persistence. This gave me the idea of a possible future self, which is another motivator for language learning success (Dweck, 2006; Mystkowska, 2014).

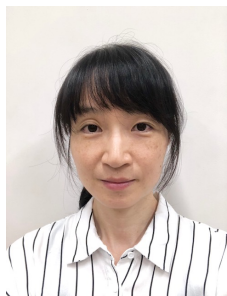
In this brief reflection on my initial L2 English learning years, I have discussed two factors which had helped me eventually become a high proficiency English user. I was studying at a time when the population in Melbourne, Australia, was predominantly Caucasian and there was no Internet or social media. The factors influencing English learners in 2018 are undoubtedly different compared to my experience in 1984, but I think learner beliefs and near-peer role models are equally important factors for language learning today.

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## Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn



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In this Members' Voices piece, I am sharing my journey from a reluctant learner of English to a teacher-learner of English. I appreciate all the opportunities that have brought me to my current profession. I have been both a good and bad learner of English. I enjoyed studying English for exams and was doing well, but never had the opportunity to use English communicatively. Maybe I was a typical Japanese school student at that time. After I got in to a university as a law major, I lost my interest in English and made just enough effort to obtain the required credits (and was sometimes absent from a class).

As I was settling into my first job at a government organization, I thought I wanted to

learn 'something' and decided to study for the TOEIC test. My long journey of being a learner and a teacher restarted here. I got married and changed jobs, but was still learning English to improve my communication skills. It was stimulating to learn about cultural differences and broaden my perspectives through the language I had already studied but had never used.

I began to teach English before and after I had children and became interested in one simple question "How can Japanese people improve English communication skills?". To me, there was an invisible barrier between those who could speak English and those who couldn't. When I was with the little babies at home, I came across many advertisements of English learning resources for kids. The question arose again and I pushed myself into a teacher's side to explore the answer. I started to teach at a private English language school. Then I expanded my interest too much and finished my master's degree in TESOL.

Now I am teaching undergraduate and graduate students in the faculty of engineering at the University of Fukui and am working on my doctoral degree at UCL Institute of Education. My research interests lie in learner identity and agency. Most of my students are quiet and look uninterested - just like I used to be. But I do hope they will become able to use English as an engineer. The interview data for my current study has shown that most of the students are aware of that, but few actually take time to study. I am analyzing the data to find out if there are any hidden meanings behind that.

My initial question "How can Japanese people improve English communication skills?" turned out to be too difficult to answer. But I think this has been a central concern of recent curriculum reform efforts by MEXT. I do believe a small effort brings about a small difference. I am exploring better ways to approach my students through my research as well as my experiences as a teacher and a learner. I hope I can be of some help to my students' long journey to become a better user of English.

## Learning Goal Orientation as a Precursor to Metacognition

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I have been teaching at Kokusai Junior College for nearly three years after experiencing more than a decade teaching in corporate and *eikaiwa* settings. Along this teaching journey, I attended numerous seminars, workshops, and conferences on teaching English. A few of the topics and speakers that stuck out were those addressing "the negative mindset" students tend to develop in junior high school and high school that remains with them throughout their English studies. Additionally, professional workers would self-deprecatingly comment on their poor English skills albeit having invested long-term in studying English. For some reason, this topic resonated within me as a wake-up call to motivate those students who disliked English. As a result, in 2010, I embarked on a mission to consume all the relevant literature that was applicable and related to language learners' (L2) motivation. I read the works of Dörnyei (2005), Gardner (1985), Deci and Ryan (1985), and Ushioda (2001). While these works provided me lenses for viewing L2 motivation, I felt they lacked practical tools for alleviating the ills inherent in "the emotional baggage" language learners brought to the classroom (Suzuki, 2017). Additionally, Matsuno (2018) in the July / August issue of *The Language Learner* presents her research on when "students begin to like or dislike English" and "the reasons associated with their preferences and motivation" (p. 19). These are the issues that I have been pondering for more than a decade: (1) Why the dislike of English? (2) How to motivate students to learn English? and (3) What practical approaches could be used in the

classroom to create a positive environment for learning English?

Last year, I focused my research on creating a positive mindset from the beginning of the semester. Naturally, students who do not like English are not motivated to learn English. Unsurprisingly, a lot of research associated with learning English and motivation has been conducted in the last decade in terms of Likert questionnaires to gauge students' favorability of learning English. While the research seems to focus on the attitudes of individual learners, I feel very little research has focused on practical application as it relates to curriculum design.

At the same time, I ran across Dweck's (2006) research on how fixed mindset inclines to be associated with a negative attitude toward learning in which a student's dialogue of negative self-talk could sound like, "I'm not good at English. I don't have the talent, and I'll never be good at English." As a result, a teacher could only imagine the countless "negative deposits" that have been made in the span of six years (from junior high school to high school) when students start to seriously learn English (Suzuki, 2017; Matsuno, 2018). Given this "emotional baggage" that students are likely to bring to the college classroom, I decided from last year to design my classes to redress those students who disliked English. While combing the research related to English learning and goal-setting, I read Harford (2008) in which she iterated that students should take ownership of their learning through reflection and goal-setting. In this regard, I decided regardless of the students' background and previous encounters in learning English, the first class is always about goal-setting for the semester, the immediate future, and the long-term. The reason, I mention the long-term, is a goal of "active learning" is connecting learning to skills that students' can home later in their lives.

Learning English is a long-term process that involves a lot of trial and error. Through this process, a systematic understanding of English develops. If a learner wishes to master English, they must be motivated and be willing to dedicate



countless numbers of years in order to reach this goal. In any given English course, students will have different reasons for taking a course. While teachers set goals and objectives for their courses to run and manage the classroom, it is the responsibility of individual learners to define goals and objectives above and beyond their current course. Setting these long-term goals and objectives could be the motivating force that moves learners toward a more positive learning experience. Most important is that goal orientation gets students to think about the big picture. It provides an anchor for the semester's journey. Thus, one means of creating a more positive learning experience is having students individually define and set learning outcomes in terms of goals and expectations for a course and plans for future improvements at the beginning of the course. Doing this serves a few purposes: (1) It allows students to define their sources of motivation; (2) It allows teachers to understand their students' needs in order to design a more positive learning experience; and (3) It is a record as reminder for both the teacher and the student on establishing a positive learning environment.

Goal-setting at the beginning of a course is better for building on the framework for fostering a student-centered classroom in which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is mainly taught, as some students may never have experienced a student-centered classroom. Moreover, teachers and students can better understand expectations and share the responsibility of creating a positive learning environment and experience. Further, teachers can understand their students' needs and attitudes about learning English at the beginning of a course, so instructors can plan lessons to challenge students with positive attitudes toward English while simultaneously motivating students with negative attitudes toward English. Finally, progress happens little by little as goals are achieved and motivation builds. I believe goal-setting is a precursor for teaching metacognitive skills. Thus, they are mutually inclusive. As a result, goal-setting in tandem with acquiring metacognitive skills for learning English, I believe, could possibly be the silver bullets for

improvement and motivation. However, if students are skewed toward fixed negative mindsets, it might be in the best interests of instructors to view learning goal orientation as a precursor and catalyst for teaching metacognitive skills.

As of April 2018, I have embarked on the journey of teaching metacognitive skills. This process has taken the initial form of "getting students to think about what they are learning" by filling in an "English Learning Log" chart that I designed, which is self-reflective and goal orientated. The students near the end of each class reflect, discuss, and fill in their charts using keywords. Before concluding the class, I will have a rapid fire Q&A with the students about the keywords they wrote. By acquiring metacognitive skills, students gain learning strategies and motivation that will gradually allow them to become autonomous learners. Ultimately, the goal of education is that autonomous learners become lifelong learners.

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