

LOOKING BACK | 報告

2019 PanSIG Learner Development SIG Forum Reflections

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This year's PanSIG Learner Development Forum at Konan University in Nishinomiya had a selection of thought-provoking presentations related to secondary and post-secondary education. The forum kicked off with Stacey Vye's presentation "University Students Bring Us to Their Secondary English Classrooms in Japan," addressing student perceptions of their secondary-school English classes. Next, Anita Aden illustrated the importance of giving students space for out-of-class English communication in "Developing Communicative Competence in Socio-Cultural Settings." In the third and final presentation, "Draw Out Your Goal: Autonomous Goal-setting in an English Self-directed Course," Ivan Lombardi and Christopher Hennessey showed the potential of a structured, self-directed learning course to increase student autonomy. The forum ended with an open discussion of ideas and learner-development issues related to the presentations that continued well into lunchtime.

As a member of the LD SIG programs team, the only downside was the small number of attendees. It is somewhat frustrating to have a small crowd for such well-researched and put together presentations. Drawing more attendees to the LD SIG forums at PanSIG and JALTCALL conferences, at least those outside of Tokyo, remains a challenge we are trying to address.

On a personal note, the most interesting experience for me was after the conference. Since the three presentations seemed to flow into one another so well we decided to write a paper based on the forum. This, my first time working on a paper with a team, has been a great learning experience—juggling not just schedules, but (over the summer) time zones. I am lucky to have had a great group of people to do this paper with. It speaks to what I feel

is one of the strengths of the LD SIG, and JALT in general: the supportive and constructive ways in which people get involved and collaborate. It makes me happy to be in a profession and field where collaboration and helping colleagues, as well as students, is the norm.

Stacey Vye, University Students Bring Us to Their Secondary English Classrooms in Japan

At the Kobe PanSIG Forum, I was interested in the contrasts between the learners in my study who did not experience a self-directed curriculum and the learners described in the other two Forum workshops who were provided supportive learner development. Forum participants Chris Hennessey and Ivan Lombardi, and Anita Aden both offered scaffolded frameworks for university students to explore their learner autonomy and engaged in active measures to support learners to communicate in English at the learners' specific interest level. My mini-Forum workshop retrospectively detailed eight learners' perceptions about their secondary school experiences in their English classrooms before they entered university. These learners explained their classes were tightly controlled by the teachers, were not learner-centered, and primarily taught in the Japanese with few opportunities to communicate or use English in English. Their perceptions about their secondary English learning experiences to different degrees negatively impacted their perceptions about their English proficiency.

When preparing for the LD SIG Forum, I envisioned that I would bring out more the individual voices of the participants. However, the questions that came up in the forum discussions related to the general concerns, the perceptions of the learners in the study, and my recommendations based on the research changed my focus. Therefore, I provided more details first about how the students and I identified independently that their learning materials and classroom activities were not, for the most part were aligned with

learner-focused communication. Second, I reported that the learners wanted more opportunities to communicate in English, which would be in closer keeping with the Ministry of Education in Japan's 2020 curriculum reforms. Third, I advocated for more teacher-training in size and scope, with ample materials for teachers and students to facilitate active communication. More effort on a considerable scale is needed by the Ministry to boost metacognitive learning, robust learner and teacher self-efficacy, and positive epistemic opportunities for students learning English to reduce potential foreign language learning anxiety in secondary schools. Subsequently, I have been working on papers and projects that highlight the voices of the learners in the study because they went at great lengths to communicate in English.

After presenting, I learned about two invaluable frameworks where university students engage in learning English based on Anita's, and then Chris's and Ivan's Forum presentations. Anita has been facilitating meaningful and authentic social interactions by promoting communicative competence via out-of-class lunch exchanges with speakers of English. Speaking with international students and teachers by all indications has boosted the learners' efficacy and self-confidence through the experiences. Chris and Ivan detailed a self-directed learning course where the students have a dedicated class to learn English that takes into account the learners' preferences in a self-access center. The well-thought-out activities Chris and Ivan suggested for their students were chosen based on learner interest and were categorized by the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. At the conclusion of the course, the students reflected on their learning goals and created elaborate and colorful posters that detailed their learning journey for further study. When I attended both presentations, I wished the university students in my research could have joined Anita's and Chris's and Ivan's English courses to experience autonomous and authentic language learning.

Anita Aden, Developing Communicative Competence in Socio-Cultural Settings

Among the positive takeaways that I experienced from taking part in the PanSIG LD forum were insightful discussions with LD SIG colleagues and conference attendees on the theme of autonomous language learning. We discussed current conditions related to university students' needs for more language output opportunities, citing specific applications of autonomous language learning in Stacey Vye's research findings on students' perceptions of their language competency, and Chris Hennessy and Ivan Lombardi's emphasis on active learning tasks in a self-access setting. These presentations combined well with my own socioculturally informed project of creating an out-of-class space during lunch breaks for university students to talk about their personal interests. I shared about the benefits of preparing a semi-structured plan that can be easily adapted to whoever participates in the lunch session. Feedback from students through anonymous surveys at the end of each session strengthened their voice to express points for improvement and satisfaction with the lunchtime format.

From the professional development discussions during the LD SIG forum, I walked away with new ideas of how to collaborate more with university students, such as adding QR codes to lessons for feedback and linking follow-up activities to assignments for further study. Specific to autonomous language learning, the emphasis on increasing students' opportunities to communicate in English needs further discussion. I believe students need more communicative competence-style chances to use English in their daily lives during university. Encouraging students to find ways to use language out-of-class helps them become autonomous learners.