

## MINI-PROFILES: SHARING YOUR LEARNER DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS |

### ミニプロフィール：学習者ディベロップメントについての関心の共有

... in which SIG members introduce themselves briefly (just 50 to 100 words or more), and write about what interests, puzzles, intrigues them about learner development, and/or about a particular approach or project, or research that they are doing or plan to do, or simply share a short reflection, to do with learner development ...

…ここでは、SIG メンバーの学習者ディベロップメント研究に取り組む原動力となる関心や課題とともに短い（50 から 100 ワード程度）自己紹介をお届けします。特別なアプローチやプロジェクト、現在進行中の研究やその計画、さらには学習者ディベロップメントの取り組みに関する内省など、それぞれの思いや考えが寄せられています。



**Emily Choong**

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Hello! Apa khabar? My name is Emily Choong. This is my first year in the LD

SIG. I am an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Niigata City teaching elementary and junior high. I am from Malaysia, a country with an extraordinarily diverse food culture and home to the tallest twin towers in the world. This English teaching job made me realise what a blessing it was for me to have grown up in a bilingual environment throughout my formal education. With that, I hope to inspire students to take an interest in learning through the lens of the world around them and beyond. In my free time, I can be found drinking coffee somewhere or recording the next episode of my podcast Cheeky Academics. If you are interested in collaborating or would like to say hello, feel free to reach out. Thank you for having me in the LD SIG!



**Henry Foster**

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Hello everyone, my name is Henry Foster. I have lived and taught English in the Kyoto area

for nearly 30 years now. I started out at a small conversation school and have ended up as an associate professor in the English Department at Bukkyo University. Along the way I obtained a Master of Applied Linguistics degree from the University of Southern Queensland and a Doctor of Education in TESOL degree from Anaheim University. I have always been interested in task-based learning and teaching because of its focus on learning by doing and the fact that it places the responsibility for noticing, selecting, and acquiring language on the learner rather than on the teacher. I have also always been interested in the role of technology and materials in language education. In my teaching, as well as in my own experiences as a language learner and as a distance student in my master's and doctoral programs, technology and the internet have always figured prominently. From these interests, I naturally found my way to language learner autonomy, which was the subject of my doctoral dissertation. I have not had any experience with self-access centers or language advising per se. Instead, my present focus is on ways that we can encourage and support the development of learner autonomy from within the language classroom. I look forward to meeting, sharing with, and learning from all of you here in the LD SIG!

For the 2022 Autumn issue of *Learning Learning* please send your mini-text or mini-profile to <[lleditorialteam@gmail.com](mailto:lleditorialteam@gmail.com)> by 31<sup>st</sup> of August.

Many thank

## MEMBERS' VOICES | メンバーの声

### Exploring the Role of Self-Esteem in Language Learning

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My first experience of learning a second language took place in Bangkok, Thailand, where I spent nearly eight years of my childhood and acquired the basic conversational fluency of English at an international school. In my late teens, I flew to the U.S., and began immersing myself in the American undergraduate and graduate studies experience and learned to use English academically. After completing an MA in second and foreign language education, I returned to Bangkok and decided that my first experience of teaching English must take place here, because this is where I first started my own second language learning experience. I taught English at a Thai government junior and senior high school for almost five years. A decade has passed since then, and now I teach English at a junior college in Tokyo. Looking back at my career as a language teacher, I must say that teaching English to Thai students as a Japanese English teacher stands out as an exceptionally interesting and eye-opening educational experience.

After graduating from an MA program in the U.S., I started to work as one of the native English instructors at a Thai government junior and senior high school to teach both their regular and intensive English programs. Although many students were rather interested in getting to know about Japanese manga and anime from an English teacher like me with a Japanese background, overall, I was impressed with their attitudes toward my English lessons. Except for a few not-

so-academically-motivated groups, students were open and active about learning the language. They were enthusiastic in getting input, loved public speaking and were not shy to share their interests and passions with other students in English. Most of all, they seemed to enjoy talking about themselves, maybe in any language, and this was indeed helping their English conversations become more vibrant and enjoyable. Is love for oneself, or more properly put, one's healthy self-esteem, an important factor for language learning? I remember thinking about this question every time I observed my Thai students' active participation in classes. Brown and Marshall (2006) describe self-esteem in three different categories: global self-esteem, self-worth, and self-evaluation. While global self-esteem refers to a personality trait of how an individual generally evaluates him/herself regardless of time and situations, self-worth and self-evaluation are affected by external factors such as events or one's abilities respectively. What the Thai students displayed, as I understood it, was unchanging affection for themselves despite class environments or differences in their English proficiency levels. How does having this type of high global self-esteem influence one's process of language learning?

Now I have been teaching English to both freshmen and sophomores at a junior college in Tokyo for almost five years, and as you can imagine, there is a stark difference between how students here react to my English lessons compared to those back in Thailand. The Japanese students are a lot more reserved in classes; they like to hide their emotions and hesitate to share their ideas with others in English. They definitely shy away from public speaking in fear of looking "different" or sounding "incorrect" to other people. There could be a million reasons why the two groups of students act so differently; however, could their levels of self-esteem have something to do with it? I began to think. Maybe

simply the Japanese students I teach are not confident of their English skills. Or maybe because they are not in “high school” anymore, they think showing themselves in front of people is immature. I don’t know. But what I know for a fact is that the Thai students I taught previously did not exactly speak ‘perfect’ English; however, they seemed to care nothing about it. They just said, whatever it was that they wanted to express like their love for K-pop idols or craze for a Netflix manga series, regardless of the expression being grammatically correct or made up of smart word choices. This type of attitude seen among Thai students, which one may describe as positive assertiveness or global self-esteem as Brown and Marshall (2006) described it, isn’t observed much amongst Japanese students. Do their self-esteem issues have something to do with it?

In 2019, the Japanese Cabinet Office conducted a survey on the attitudes of young people between ages 13 to 29 in 7 different countries including Japan. What the study revealed was that when compared to the youths of other nations such as the U.S., and South Korea, Japan shows a lower percentage on those who maintain healthy self-esteem; they indicate a smaller number of youths with confidence in their own strengths, self-satisfaction, and effect on others (White Paper on Children and Young People, 2019). The results showed that this tendency has grown even bigger since the last survey completed in 2016. So, it has been proven that Japanese young people have a less positive perception of themselves in comparison to their international counterparts. Could this be one of the factors that affect their ability to speak English, as the nature of the language requires some sort of “showing” to others with confidence, in other words, self-expression with clarity and persuasiveness?

Growing up in an English-speaking school in Thailand and being educated in the U.S., for both my undergraduate and graduate studies, I too went through a fair number of struggles learning English as my second language. Although I had acquired some basic conversational fluency in the language as a teenager, I had difficulty succeeding

academically during the first few undergraduate years in the U.S., It took me about three years to finally get the hang of writing a good paper with a good thesis statement and getting an A for it consistently. I remember being awfully nervous giving a presentation for my econ or poli sci class just like my Japanese students are now afraid of speaking publicly during my English lessons. This nervousness, however, somehow disappeared after undergoing intensive reading and writing day after day for class assignments. I recognized a change in my voice; it got deeper and stronger as if I had built up enough confidence to sound more certain of myself in English. I became more comfortable with giving public speeches and presentations, and exchanging ideas and opinions openly with my peers became much easier. So, even from my own experience, it seems there is a connection between one’s level of confidence and L2 communication skills. Does this mean that having healthy self-esteem is an essential component of one’s adequate academic performance in L2? If so, in what ways?

Guban-Caisido (2020) presents an overview of recent research that explores the relationship between self-esteem and language learning. According to her analysis, current developments on the topic concur that self-esteem is a significant factor that influences one’s process of learning a second language. Three correlations were found in the trends among 20 articles the researcher investigated to include: self-esteem and language skills, self-esteem and second or foreign language proficiency, and self-esteem and other emotional variables in language classrooms such as anxiety and motivation. The study emphasizes the need for further examination into the relationship between self-esteem and language learning to help English language learners handle their language problems from a psychological perspective.

I know I have a lot to learn from the previous studies like that of Guban-Caisido (2020) as a starter, but sharing the questions I have developed over the years of my teaching experiences in two different countries, Japan and Thailand, has certainly led me to the role of self-

esteem in language learning as a new topic of my research interest. I know it is still broad at this stage, and I don't know how I will figure it out yet. But reflecting upon my own experience of acquiring a second language as well as observing the learning process of the two culturally different groups of students, my perception is that having a healthy self-esteem is a crucial element that enhances one's capacity to use a second language. With this understanding, I am starting the exploration, and I hope a fresh perspective on the matter will lead to a new psychological approach to English language learning and help students become confident and effective users of the English language.

References:

- Brown, J. D., & Marshall, M. A. (2006). The three faces of self-esteem. In M. Kernis (Ed.), *Self-esteem: Issues and answers* (pp. 4-9). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Cabinet Office. (2019). *White Paper on Children and Young People*.  
<https://www8.cao.go.jp/youth/suisin/hakusho.html>
- Guban-Caisido, D. (2020). Self-Esteem and Language Learning: Empirical Evidence from the Past Two Decades. *Journal of Teaching & Learning English in Multicultural Contexts*, 4 (2), 95-106.

Members' Voices / メンバーの声

- #1: a short personal profile of yourself as a learner and teacher and your interest in learner development (about 500 to 1,000 words) : 学習者・教員としての自身のプロフィールと学習者の成長に関する興味 (約 2,000 字-4,000 字)
- #2: a story of your ongoing interest in, and engagement with, particular learner development (and/or learner autonomy) issues (about 500 to 1,000 words) : 学習者の成長や学習者の自律に関する興味や取り組み (約 2,000 字-4,000 字)
- #3: a short profile of your learner development research interests and how you hope to develop your research (about 500 to 1,000 words) : 学習者の成長に関する研究内容と今後の研究の展望 (約 2,000 字-4,000 字)
- #4: a short profile of your working context and the focus on learner development/learner autonomy that a particular institution takes and/or is trying to develop in a particular curriculum (about 500 to 1,000 words) : 教育環境の紹介、所属機関やカリキュラムにおける学習者の成長や自律に関する取り組み (約 2,000 字-4,000 字)