Kayo Ozawa
Kyoritsu Women's College
kozawa[at]kyoritsu-wu[dot]ac[dot]jp

I first learned about the Learner Development SIG (LD) SIG when I was a student at Teachers College Columbia University in Tokyo when Dr. John Fanselow and Dr. Terry Royce were leading the program. I took a class on autonomy, but it wasn't until recently that I realized the importance of the concept, as I have shifted from mainly teaching at a high school with many returnee students for over 35 years to teaching at private universities for over ten years, and more recently, to teaching in a study abroad program for a year and a half. Autonomy is important because a fundamental purpose of education is to be able to interpret the materials given to you by the teacher, rather than just memorizing or parroting what the teacher authority has said. Autonomy "has been central to European liberal-democratic and liberal-humanist thought" (Lindley, 1986) and is not necessarily a given concept in Asian societies. Returnees, especially if they have been educated in English-speaking countries and educational systems for a long time, will try to maintain if not improve their English without much outside pressure thanks in part to their ability to carry out self-directed learning. However, in the more common Japanese teaching contexts, careful scaffolding is necessary to help motivate students. In terms of improvement, I feel that the students' writing skills have improved dramatically over the past few years, amongst other skills. However, due to the collectivist and conformist nature of Japanese society, autonomy for individual students is still a very important area for the teacher to delve into. One of my puzzles in learner development is I wonder how much scaffolding is necessary for introducing new vocabulary expressions and grammatical structures, especially in projects involving speaking. Recently, I taught a Debate class in a highly proficient class, and I was impressed with how "self-run" the debates could be after a few rounds of careful scaffolding and videotaping. I am pondering how such autonomous practices can be incorporated into my other university classes when they do projects expanding on various topics in their textbooks. I have also recently picked up Prof. Phil Benson's "Teaching and Researching Autonomy" to see if I can gain some insight. I'm particularly interested in deepening my understanding of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Dewey's ideas regarding reflection, and how to incorporate self-organized language learning communities within the classroom.

REFERENCES

Benson, P. (2013). *Teaching and researching autonomy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Lindley, R. (1986). *Autonomy*. Macmillan.