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Hello everyone! My name is Atsuko Takizawa. I am very happy to have this opportunity to introduce myself to the Learner Development SIG.

This April, at the age of 55, I became a first-year university teacher. Before that, I taught English at Japanese high schools in Gunma Prefecture for 33 years. I am now teaching at a university in the same prefecture. So, in a sense, I am a new teacher again!

Moving from high school to university has been a big adjustment for me. I am enjoying it, but I have also realized that I still have a lot to learn. I am learning how university students learn, how to design classes for them, and, of course, how to become a better university teacher.

I mainly teach students in the Department of Elementary Education. My courses include required English I and II, as well as two elective courses for students who want to become elementary school teachers. One focuses on teaching English in elementary schools, and the other focuses on how to teach foreign languages in elementary school.

During my 33 years as a high school teacher, I taught at schools with students of different levels. For many years, I taught grammar in detail, often with a reference book at hand, because my students were preparing for university entrance exams. However, when I moved to a school where there was very little grammar instruction and more emphasis on using English, I was initially confused about how to teach. Gradually, I realized that students could learn a lot from one another, and that I did not always need to explain everything myself. Sometimes, I could help them learn simply by supporting their activities.

My own interest in English began because I thought the sound of English was cool. So, I am happy to be involved in elementary school English education, where listening to and speaking English are important.

There is another thing I have to admit. I am an English teacher, but I am not fluent in English myself! Sometimes, when I have to speak English in front of other teachers, I think, “Oh no, I still have a long way to go!” I have studied and used English for many years, but I still have a strong desire to become more fluent someday.

I feel this desire most strongly when I cannot immediately find the English words I need to express what I want to say. I can often understand English, but speaking spontaneously is still difficult for me.

Maybe this is one reason why I am interested in learner development. I am not only a teacher of English; I am also an English learner. I know what it feels like to want to improve, to make mistakes, and sometimes to feel nervous about using English.

My current students are mainly first-year university students. Many of them are not very confident in English, and some of them are afraid of making mistakes. In my classes, I try to give them many chances to use English through pair and group activities, short speeches, presentations, and other communicative activities.

One thing I particularly want to create is a classroom where students can think, “It’s okay to make mistakes here.” I believe that students need to feel safe and comfortable before they can really try to communicate in another language.

One student wrote in her reflection that she was no longer as afraid of speaking English as before. She said that although she could not say she was good at speaking English yet, she had started to

use some of the words she had learned. She also wrote that she had disliked English before, but was beginning to like it, and that she was wondering how she could become able to speak English.

I don't think this means that my class made a big difference, but I was happy to see these small changes in her attitude toward English.

I am also beginning to think about how I can connect my teaching practice with research. I am interested in active learning, learner reflection, classroom interaction, and psychological safety. I would like to understand more about how these things can help students become more confident and independent learners.

At the moment, I am still finding my way as a university teacher and as a researcher. I sometimes feel that I am starting all over again at 55! But I also enjoy being a learner myself.

I joined the Learner Development SIG because I would like to meet people who are interested in similar questions and learn from their ideas and experiences. I hope to share my own experiences, even though I am still learning, and perhaps find some new questions along the way.

And, of course, I hope that one day I will be able to say, "Yes, I am finally fluent in English!"

I look forward to meeting you and learning together.

Christopher "Tophe" Zuelke
English Language Educational Council of Japan
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My name is Tophe, and I currently work with the English Language Education Council of Japan which is an educational foundation and charity that works with universities and boards of education across Japan to provide general and specific-purposes English courses and teacher development training sessions. Primarily, I teach for a three-stage medical English thread at a medical university, though I also teach in two university general education programs and provide teacher development training for all levels of education. The medical English courses are by far the most interesting and most rewarding courses I have taught; on the one hand, I am able to participate in student learning experiences that will have an impact far beyond my classroom, stretching to future doctors at hospitals in and outside of Japan. On the other hand, I have never been more challenged in my ability to craft learning experiences that support the widest variety of proficiencies and motivations that I have ever encountered.

That second point is the critical reason I decided to join the Learner Development SIG. I have been an active member in JALT for a couple years now, engaging with events and groups focused on my background and current interests in applied linguistics, psychometrics, and educational psychology. However, I wanted to join a group of minds that I could engage with to better learn about and contribute to supporting diverse learner development needs. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from other Learner Development members and to continue expanding my professional and personal impact.

Since a young age, I knew I wanted to be an educator. My school district kept a "scrapbook" of sorts containing various "what do you want to be when you grow up?" leaflets of its students throughout their formative years. Aside from my brief stint aspiring to be a medical doctor during sophomore year in high school, in this scrapbook I never strayed very far from one answer: **teacher**. From primary to post-secondary, I was privileged to have several educators who truly embodied learner development and autonomous learning. My formative experiences instilled those values into my teaching identity

today; I see myself first and foremost as a teacher who teaches learning (the language part is a bonus—a passionate one, though, that's for sure!).

My major interests have developed over the years I've spent studying and teaching. During my M.A. program, I was engrossed in dissecting the language acquisition process, developing a new model of language acquisition known as the *holoprocesstic language acquisition model (HPLAM*). At the time, I was dissatisfied by the dichotomy in the literature between cognitivist and sociocultural perspectives, so the obvious approach to my Master's dissertation was to fix the entire problem by myself … let me know if I was successful (Zuelke, 2023). While creating this model, I became increasingly interested in what it means for learners to actually intake something, how we assess this intake, and how teachers can help learners build an autonomous capacity to make learning happen for themselves.

During the end of my Master's program, I found an unlikely ally in educational assessment and measurement. Depending on your viewpoints, you may find assessment, measurement, and psychometrics learner-centric or learner-suppressive. I found myself entangled in a bit of hypocrisy; the very dichotomous frustration I had with the language acquisition literature had spawned a similar problem in my assessment interests. During my Master's program, I learned various statistical approaches to measuring learning, and I was generally supportive and defensive of statistical practices, despite often being seen as learner-suppressive.

Diving further into this interest, I explored common learning measures. Apparently not humbled enough by my attempt to create a language acquisition model, I attempted to tackle a newfound frustration: the ingrained use of the "average" as a representation of growth. This led me into a year-long period of developing two new statistical measures to educational measurement.

My initial exploration resulted in the **Core Density Range (CDR)**, which examined how incorporating median-based measures might add greater dimension to the concept of a single core ability value, particularly when individual strengths or weaknesses might otherwise disproportionately influence the result. However, as I worked on the CDR, I found an unignorable wall looming over my work: is it truly an accurate picture of learner growth when an aggregate score includes values from the beginning of their learning experience? I didn't know it yet, but this was the first shift in what would soon become a much more radical movement in my assessment mindset. And like any good horror movie, I did what any character would do: ignored this obvious sign.

Eventually, though, I could ignore it no longer and decided to do something about it. I started with a question: "How can we make sure learner development acknowledges the entire learning experience?" My answer was shifting away from aggregation and into patterns, which ultimately led to the development of the **Growth Bi-Index (GBI)**, which is a preliminary approach (still ironing out some wrinkles…) for examining patterns in growth rate and growth accumulation across an assessment stream. By helping teachers see how quickly a student is learning and how much they appear to be retaining, this statistic shows a clearer picture of how a learner is developing across a course and can be used to provide more targeted support and development opportunities.

And then a piece of my brain spoke up to me:

> *This is all fine, dandy, and numerically pretty, but what is assessment really for?*

Not a great thing to tell a number-hungry assessor at 1:00am on too little sleep and too much burn out. And while I still continue to explore statistical approaches to measuring learning, it nevertheless did lead me to the other half: **ungrading** (Blum, 2020). This is…

> assessment when we treat it as a fiber of the learning process itself.
> assessment when we question what a grade actually means.
> assessment when we realize that, in many cases, a grade hardly means anything at all.
> assessment when, an 'A' or a 'B' or a 70 or an 80 doesn't mean as much as we think.

assessment when you realize grades are wildly inconsistent and incomparable across disciplines.

Ungrading took my passion by storm because it challenges assumptions about assessment and its role in learner development that we rarely question:

If teachers teach learners how to learn, what happens when the grade leaves the classroom?
What happens when this "objective" measure is no longer a component of motivation?
How do we give assessment back to the learner while trusting they will do it well?

Of course, I understand the complexity of these arguments. I also begrudgingly admit that I still believe grades help teachers and learners make sense of development and achievement (and my passion for finding more effective statistical measures has not yet waned!), but institutionalized uses of grades have led their purpose astray. I also acknowledge that current systems pose significant constraints that make this grade-no grade dichotomy much grayer than the black and white I've painted above.

What I am hoping is that, if you have read this far, first of all, thank you! Second, the Learner Development SIG seems to be a great place to bring my assessment-focused passions to a larger audience and to begin bridging the broader question of how assessment can move beyond measurement and into learner development.

Assessment is only one facet of my learner development interests. Educational psychology and my new hyperfixation—cognitive neuroscience—are two more areas I fervently pursue. I am still figuring out how all of these interests fit together as a research agenda, which is another reason I am glad to be part of the Learner Development SIG. I hope to learn from other members, collaborate in this developmental space, and share some of the things I have been experimenting with.

REFERENCES

Blum, S. D. (Ed.). (2020). *Ungrading: Why rating students undermines learning (and what to do instead)*. West Virginia University Press.

Zuelke, C. J. (2023). *Bridging the divide: Synthesizing a sociocultural-cognitive model of language acquisition* [Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin–River Falls]. MINDS@UW. https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/84216

Ian Lawrence
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I'm Ian Lawrence, and I work for Hokuriku Gakuin University at the Center for International Understanding (CIU), our SALC, as well as the university's attached elementary school and kindergarten. I'm a new JALT member and am excited to be a part of the Learner Development SIG. Learner development is a subject which, along with young English language learners (YELLs), is a major part of my recently completed Master's thesis research for the University of Nottingham. Although I've only just begun conducting my own research, I am interested in how learners make their experience their own and come to find the methods that work for them, especially informal learning like Extramural English (EE).

My thesis research (which I will present at the JALT conference in Nagoya this year) is about home English learning among Japanese elementary schoolers (a.k.a. おうち英語, "Ouchi Eigo"), comparing child and parent narratives regarding motivation and actual practices. What made the study fascinating was to observe the interaction of conscious attempts by parents to create (or sometimes simply allow) English immersion environments at home and the learning motivation of the children themselves.

Based on my observations, I hope to continue research into how even the same activities like watching TV or playing video games in English can mean different things to different children based on how they use it (e.g. pure enjoyment, memorizing lines) and why (e.g. preferring an English version, family policy), as well as the degree to which they identify as an "English speaker". This kind of home learning is gaining traction in Japan, so I'm interested in further exploring how different kinds of L2 immersion activities, plus the "how" and "why" they are carried out, indicate or affect learner motivation and affect. Additionally, I want to explore under what conditions learners, especially children, begin to identify as speakers of a language and not only learners.

In that regard Ideal L2 Self and learner self-ideation also interest me, influenced largely by what I have heard and seen both in Japanese media and interactions with Japanese friends, students, colleagues, etc., where there seems to be an overwhelmingly pessimistic attitude towards language learning. While I conducted a questionnaire study with students at Hokuriku Gakuin University that suggested that having Japanese role models who speak English well might be linked to Ideal L2 Self and communicative confidence, I would like to dig deeper both into how integrative motivation could be affected by preconceptions about groups which learners identify with (in this case, "Japanese are bad at English") and how to help learners see themselves as English speakers.

These interests inform my work at Hokuriku Gakuin. At the kindergarten, "English time" revolves around play, not only books and songs but also playground games that, with practice, the children can learn to play independently. On the other hand, my role at the elementary school is to facilitate the students' expression of what they want to say, not simply what is prescribed in the curriculum. My work at the Center for International Understanding is about personalizing learning and helping students see themselves as "users" of English rather than "learners", using and developing the English they have to accomplish the things that are relevant and meaningful for them.

I am making my first steps into the academic community, and I am both grateful for the chance to join a community of people with the same focus and excited to keep learning.

LD SIG Membership Survey
Members' Voices & Learner Development Interests (Autumn 2026)

As a way for people in the LD SIG to make contact with each other, we include here responses from five SIG members to the 2026 mini-survey about their learner development interests, including:

- their teaching context
- their interests in learner development as a teacher/learner
- their learner development research interests
- what they are interested in discussing with other SIG members
- whether they would like to present at an LD event in 2026 and beyond.

If you haven't had a chance yet, please take a few minutes to do the survey and share your interests so that your voice and perspectives can also be included in the next issue of *Learning Learning*. Thank you! (Survey: https://forms.gle/xN8QBVJMH2mBArok7)

HUW DAVIES, CHIBA

Email: <h DOT davies1 AT MARK gmail DOT com>

Context: University teacher

Teacher/learner interests: Having choices and giving choices!

Research interests: In the past, I have published on learner autonomy, learning strategies, and self-access. These days I am more interested in exploring learner development within the classroom setting.

Interested in discussing with other SIG members: I am most interested in the pedagogical approaches or choices I can make to maximise what learners take from their university courses with me. My university pushes a CLIL approach (in some classes), but I am not convinced this is what the learners want. Certainly I am interested in collaborative learning, and I feel like task-based approaches have some relevance. However, I am not entirely sure and would welcome the chance to discuss pedagogy with others in the LD SIG.

Interested in presenting at an LD event in the future? Yes, but I don't yet know on what!

LUIS G. COLON-TORRES, NAGASAKI

Email: <lcolontorres AT MARK albany DOT edu>

Context: I currently work as an English language/literacy coach at a Japanese university, where I support students through test preparation, one-on-one English coaching, and progress monitoring in relation to university benchmarks. Before this role, I taught students from elementary through high school in both the U.S. and Japan.

Teacher/learner interests: As a practitioner-researcher, I am interested in learner- and classroom-focused inquiry, particularly how students develop greater agency, confidence, and awareness as language learners. Because this work is grounded in specific teaching and learning contexts, my inquiries often shift in response to students' needs, experiences, and classroom realities.

I hope to connect with other educators in the Learner Development SIG to learn more about their contexts, practices, and approaches to supporting students' growth as independent and reflective learners.

Research interests: I am interested in exploring the classroom as a site for collaborative teacher-student inquiry, where participants engage with each other within a community of learners to reflect on their own experiences, questions, and goals. My research interests include learner agency, reflective practice, and the ways students participate in shaping classroom learning. I am especially interested in how taking an inquiry stance through practitioner research can help teachers become more attuned to learners' perspectives while also supporting more responsive teaching practices.

Interested in discussing with other SIG members: I would like to explore critical literacies, learner identities, student well-being, and collaborative learning with other SIG members. I would be especially interested in connecting with educators who are pursuing, or are curious about, practitioner research and participatory action research. I hope to discuss how these approaches can help teachers and learners better understand the experiences, needs, and meaning-making in specific classroom contexts for all who are involved in teaching and learning.

Interested in presenting at an LD event in the future? I would like to know more about the kinds of presentations or discussions that LD SIG members find useful. I have only recently begun exploring the possibilities of practitioner research in Japan, particularly as it relates to learner development, so it would be helpful to learn what kinds of questions, classroom experiences, or works-in-progress are welcomed at LD events.

Other comments: I am looking forward to connecting! :-)

YUKARI KIMURA, KANAZAWA, ISHIKAWA

Email: <yukarikimura2702 AT MARK gmail DOT com>

Context: I am a university lecturer, occasionally advising on language learning.

Teacher/learner interests: The students I am currently teaching are taking required courses in a science-related department, so their sense of self-efficacy and motivation regarding English learning are somewhat low. I would like to find ways to increase learner engagement both inside and outside the classroom.

Research interests: I am interested in learner autonomy, learning beyond the classroom, self-regulated learning, learner engagement, reflective dialogue, and language learning advising.

Interested in discussing with other SIG members: I would like to explore or discuss learner autonomy and autonomy-supportive teaching practices, learning beyond the classroom and technology, as well as learner engagement and complex dynamic systems theory.

Interested in presenting at an LD event in the future? Yes - on how can teachers support learner autonomy?

Other comments: Thank you for organizing this survey and creating a networking opportunity with other SIG members.

MIKE KUZIW, FUKUI

Email: <mike DOT kuziw AT MARK gmail DOT com>

Context: University teacher

Teacher/learner interests: I'm interested in how learners develop over time. In the classroom, I am keen on giving students as much flexibility as possible to learn how to learn and be autonomous. I also believe that consistent reflection is key to success, so students complete a reflection after each lesson.

Research interests: I've recently been interested in student well-being and belonging when it comes to learning. This is especially the case with non-Japanese students' ability to learn in the classroom, particularly in elementary schools/JHS.

Interested in discussing with other SIG members: I would like to collaborate with other SIG members in areas regarding learner identities and student well-being. I'm curious to know if there are other members who are working with divergent learners either in the classroom or in a self-access learning environment

Interested in presenting at an LD event in the future? Although I am doing research in my area of interest, I want to know what interests the other SIG members and hope to gain insights from them when presenting on a given topic. For me, I would be happier presenting on a topic to members of similar interests.

VIVIAN TURK, NAGOYA

Email: <vivianturk AT hotmail DOT co DOT uk>

Context: University teacher

Teacher/learner interests: What interests me most is what happens when learning starts to matter beyond the classroom. I enjoy designing activities that help students connect what they learn with their own lives and communities. I am also interested in how reflection can gradually lead to greater confidence and involvement.

Research interests: My research focuses on learner identity and agency, particularly how students move from awareness to action. I am interested in what makes that movement possible, and why it sometimes does not happen at all.

Interested in discussing with other SIG members: I would enjoy talking with others about learner autonomy, identity, and participation. I am especially interested in how these develop over time and how unpredictable that process can be.

Interested in presenting at an LD event in the future? Yes. I would be interested in presenting on how learners move from awareness to participation. My current focus is on the "action threshold" and the factors that influence whether students actually act on what they notice, discuss, or reflect on in class.

Call for Contributions to Members' Voices | メンバーの声

Send to lleditorialteam[at]gmail[dot]com by February 9th, 2027

#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)