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Editorial

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Welcome to the 30th issue of SiSAL Journal which is Issue 8, Volume 3. This is a general issue, but I organised it into three key themes: learning spaces (three papers), supporting learners (two papers), and professional development for learning advisors (two papers). There are also details three relevant events coming up within the next year.

Learning spaces, is a good theme to start with and the first paper is a research paper contributed by G. Victoria Madrid Durazo and E. Desirée Castillo Zaragoza from the Universidad de Sonora in Mexico. The authors describe a qualitative longitudinal research project which was carried out in the SAC at their institution. The purpose of the research was to understand learners' performance as they direct their own learning in a SAC. The authors focus on learning experiences, activities, and materials in order to present some interesting results showing learners' understandings of the language learning process due to working in a SAC.

The second paper takes us to the United Kingdom, where Marion Krauthaker from the University of Leicester provides a report on the observations and conclusions based on a project which assessed self-access foreign language centres (SALCs) in UK higher education institutions between 2014 and 2016. Drawing on data collected from in-depth interviews with stakeholders at 12 institutions, the author suggests that the findings reveal challenges related to resources and support which need to addressed in the coming years.

In the third paper, Garold Murray, Mariko Uzuka, and Naomi Fujishima draw upon data collected during a five-year ethnographic study conducted at a self-access facility at a large national university in Japan. The focus of the paper is on the experiences and voices of international students studying at the university. Based on the findings, the authors suggest that we reflect on the role of social learning spaces and how they support the process of glocalization by contributing to the globalization of facilities in Japan.

The second theme contained in this issue is 'supporting learners' and the first paper was written by my own colleagues Amber Barr and Phoebe Lyon at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. The authors provide a discussion of ways in which language educators might support learners in making choices of graded materials to select. Choices

such as these can be daunting to learners, but making such choices undoubtedly contributes to the development of their autonomy. Drawing on data collected from surveys, the authors summarise some factors that affected learners' initial and subsequent book choices which give an insight into some of the issues and dilemmas facing learners.

The second paper in this theme was contributed by Rachael Ruegg, Taku Sudo, Hinako Takeuchi, and Yuko Sato and was the result of an evaluation of a peer tutoring programme operating at a university in Japan. One interesting aspect of this paper is that it was written as a collaboration between a faculty member and three student tutors, surely an excellent example of engaging learners in the learning, writing, and researching process. The aim of the paper is to provide an overview of the tutoring programme for others interested in setting up a similar service. It gives insights into features of running a centre along with some details of successes and challenges.

The final two papers relate to the theme of 'professional development for learning advisors'. I have witnessed an increase in papers exploring the nature, roles, and features of advising in the past few years. As the field develops, it seems appropriate that more attention is given to how learning advisors are trained, supported, and mentored. Saki Inoue, a learning advisor and coordinator based at Kanazawa University in Japan summarises an overview of an ongoing training and professional development programme for language learning advisors. Drawing on reflections contributed by eight advisors the author indicates areas where the professional development programme could be enhanced.

Finally, Satoko Kato, an experienced advisor and advisor educator based at Kanda Institute of Foreign Studies in Japan presents research which draws upon the life narrative approach as a way of tapping into the personal constructs of experienced learning advisors. The study investigates the effects of drawing a 'picture of life' (PL) at the beginning of a six-month mentoring programme by looking into mentees' views and also features that indicate the development of the mentoring relationship and how the PL promoted deeper connections.

Upcoming Events

Firstly, as previously announced, the Japan Association on Self-Access Learning (JASAL) Annual Conference 2017 will be held at my own institution Kanda University of

International Studies in Chiba Japan on 16th December. Details are available on the JASAL website https://jasalorg.com/.

There are two other events that might be of interest to colleagues based both within and outside Japan as they are part of international organisations who happen to be hosting events in Japan in 2018. The first is the Psychology of Language Learning Conference. PLL3 is the official event associated with the International Association of the Psychology of Language Learning. Previous conferences were in Finland (2016) and Austria (2014). PLL3 will be held at Waseda University in Tokyo from June 7-10. The call for papers closes on December 11th. More details are available on the website http://www.pll3-tokyo2018.com/

Finally, the Independent Learning Association has been running for many years and has hosted conferences in Australia (2003), New Zealand (2005 and 2012), Japan (2007), Hong Kong (2009), Thailand (2014) and China (2016). Next year, it returns to Japan and will take place at Konan Women's University in Kobe on September 5-8. The theme is *Whose Autonomy? Voices and Agency in Language Learning* and the call for papers closes on December 31st.

Acknowledgments

Notes on the Editor

Jo Mynard is the founding editor of SiSAL Journal. She is an associate professor and the Director of the Self-Access Learning Centre at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. She was also recently appointed Director of the newly established Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education (RILAE). She holds an M.Phil. in Applied Linguistics from Trinity College, Dublin and an Ed.D. in TEFL from the University of Exeter in the UK. She has been involved in facilitating self-access language learning since 1996.

Learners' Work in a SAC: A Longitudinal Study

G. Victoria Madrid Durazo, Universidad de Sonora, Mexico

E. Desirée Castillo Zaragoza, Universidad de Sonora, Mexico

Abstract

Self-access centers (SACs) became popular in Mexico in the 1990s with the purpose of allowing learners to make decisions about how to learn languages. The following study is qualitative and longitudinal and was carried out in the SAC at the University of Sonora in Mexico. It was designed with the purpose of understanding learners' performance as they direct their own learning in a SAC. By focusing on learning experiences, activities, and materials, the results show that learners understand the idea of language learning in SACs in a limited way. However, the participants view learning in a SAC to be an effective approach to learning languages due to the progress and growth they noticed.

Key words: self-directed language learning, self-access center, learning experience

Self-access centers (SACs) provide learners with opportunities to experience language learning in a unique way. Such experiences are shaped by the learners' decision-making in the SAC regarding the determination of objectives and the activities to be carried out, the selection of materials needed and the appropriate way to use them. With this in mind, having a better understanding of the learners' practices in SACs is necessary to comprehend their language learning process.

This project was designed to increase knowledge about SAC learners' performance, investigating how they adapt to self-directed learning, the activities they carry out, and the materials they use. The article presents the learning experiences of five SAC learners, through the analysis of the aspects mentioned above.

Literature Review

Language learning in self-access centers

Self-access centers were first established with the idea of promoting learning autonomy in the language learning context; learner autonomy is a notion by which learners develop the capacity of controlling their own learning (Holec, 1981). Autonomous language learners make

decisions regarding objectives and content, methodology and strategies, as well as monitoring and evaluation. According to Holec (2017), SACs are facilities where different resources and services are offered to learners in order to help them learn languages in a self-directed way. SACs are likely to contain a wide range of materials, and provide learning to learn workshops, advising programs, conversation groups, among other services. Based on Gardner and Miller (1999), SACs offer a learning environment in which every learner develops in a particular way. As they pointed out, language learning in SACs involves "an integration of a number of elements which combine to provide a learning environment. Each learner interacts with the environment in a unique way" (Gardner & Miller, 1999, p. 8).

A SAC as a learning environment

According to Gardner and Miller (1999), elements of a SAC create a learning environment that increases the possibilities for learning opportunities. As self-directed language learning is promoted in SACs, learning experiences may develop once learners begin to freely interact in such spaces through the carrying out of different activities and the use of the materials and resources offered to them (Domínguez, 2012). In this sense, learners explore new learning experiences (Croker & Ashurova, 2012) by which they become more involved in their learning process and start to adapt to a different way of learning (Herrera, 2012).

In order to provide learners with a more effective way to work in a SAC, the center may offer the help of advisors. They will help learners to reflect on their own learning and develop their capacity to learn (Gremmo, 1995; Mozzon-McPherson, 2001, 2007; Victori, 2007). In this sense, the role of advisors is extremely important in a SAC (Gremmo & Riley, 1995).

Based on the previous information in this project, the learning experience in a SAC refers to that unique way in which every learner interacts with the environment to make decisions regarding their learning.

SAC context in Mexico

In Mexico, the development of SACs began in 1994 with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) causing an exponential increase in the demand for foreign languages (FL); however, there were not enough facilities and teachers prepared to address the situation. Under these conditions, the government, via its Mexican Ministry of

Education, started to take measures. One of these was the training of FL teachers, particularly in English, which, at the time resulted in a large number of BA English Language Teaching programs that are now offered all over the country (Castillo Zaragoza, 2006). The second measure was the introduction of SACs for language learning in every state university of the country, which meant that 32 SACs were established in order to start providing Foreign Language Learning services. In tripartite agreements, the ministry initiated the following: 1) funding was provided in order to set up the SACs, 2) teachers were trained, and 3) state universities provided the facilities. As a result, there are currently over 250 self-access centers across the country, suggesting that SACs are an important element of the Mexican university context.

Research in Mexico regarding language learning in SACs has covered different aspects, such as ideologies about the setting up of SACs (Castillo Zaragoza, 2006); the advisor's role and training (Clemente, 2003; Contijoch Escontria, 2000; Fabela Cárdenas, 2012); the characteristics of learners who visit SACs (Bufi Zanón & Chávez Sánchez, 2000); material development in the SAC (Groult Bois, 2000); plurilingualism by the advisor (Castillo & Gremmo, 2003; Gremmo & Castillo, 2006) and the learner (Castillo Zaragoza, 2011; Castillo Zaragoza & Pamplón Irigoyen, 2013); and learning experiences in SACs (Castillo Zaragoza, 2011, 2014; Domínguez Gaona, 2013; Herrera, 2012). As rich and varied as research in Mexico has been, there is a need to continue researching learners' decisions regarding their learning and actual performance in a SAC.

Recent studies on SACs

Recent studies related to language learning in SACs have been developed in the Asian, American and European continents in countries such as Japan, Mexico, France, Germany and Turkey. For the most part, these studies are framed on a qualitative approach and have employed data collection instruments that include semi-structured interviews, questionnaires or surveys, observations, and analysis of documents such as portfolios, diaries or attendance registers.

The research developed has focused on different aspects including:

- Advising in SACs (Harootian, 2015; Kato & Mynard, 2015; Morrison & Navarro, 2012; Mynard & Carson, 2012; Mynard & Navarro, 2010; Tweed, 2016; Uzun, Karaaslan, & Şen, 2016);

- SAC users' motivation (Castillo Zaragoza, 2011; Croker & Ashurova, 2012; Gillies, 2010);
- Development of communities of practice and social interaction in SACs (Acuña, Avila, & Holmes, 2015; Allhouse, 2014; Gardner & Miller, 2014; Noguchi, 2015);
- Learning experiences in SACs (Castillo Zaragoza, 2011, 2014; Domínguez Gaona, 2013; Herrera, 2012).

It is worth mentioning that the studies in the latter category were all developed in Mexico and are closely related to the purpose of the present study. They served as a reference because they paid attention to the individual and their lived experiences in the SAC, providing a deeper view of the SAC learner and the learning taking place. Nonetheless, as mentioned before, more investigation is needed regarding the actual work people do when they are in the SAC on their own. Therefore, the present research attempts to close the gap and to help build a better understanding of the learners' development in SACs.

Method

Context

The study was developed at the *Centro de Autoaprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras* (CAALE), a SAC located in the Foreign Languages Department (FLD) at the University of Sonora in northern Mexico, where different language courses are offered to the local and university community. The SAC is available for the people registered in one of the mentioned courses, as well as to people not taking any language classes. According to the FLD's website (Foreign Languages Department, 2014), CAALE is a place where people can learn and practice languages, it has a variety of materials and resources accessible for its users, and overall, it represents an alternative for those who have a difficulty attending classes on a regular basis, want to work at their own pace, or wish to prepare for an official test. The resources and materials included at CAALE support learners of Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Additionally, CAALE offers advising sessions to guide users in the development of a working plan, learning strategies, available materials, and the different ways to use them.

Objectives and research questions

The purpose of this project was to obtain data that would lead to a better understanding of the SAC users and the work they carry out. This information was based on the analysis of the activities learners carried out, the materials and resources they selected and how they used them. In other words, the objective was to obtain knowledge about the users' language learning experience in CAALE as they adapted to the environment and a self-directed learning process.

The research questions on which the study focused were:

- How do the participants learn in the SAC?

- What materials and resources do the participants select, why do they choose them, how do they work with them and why?

- How do they adapt to the SAC environment?

Research methods

Considering that qualitative research is preferred for describing and interpreting a phenomenon, as well as the meaning of it to those involved within its natural context (Cresswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glesne, 2011), this study was designed as qualitative and longitudinal. Therefore, it was done within the learners' environment. Data collection methods included two interviews, observations, and the analysis of learning diaries. Finally, it was conducted over a two-semester period, which allowed the researcher to familiarize with the SAC's functioning (during the first semester of the study) and to give the opportunity to the learners to develop and interact in the SAC environment (during the second semester of the study)[1].

The project is characterized by the development of a case study that focused on the description and interpretation of the activities carried out in the SAC by five participants. The decision was made because case studies enable the exploration of an individual's meaning to a particular situation (Yin, 2003). Each case study described the learners' perspective about their own particular learning process in CAALE.

Research scheme and data collection

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[1] This study was designed from a larger project developed by the second author of this article. For the first author, the experience in SACs began with the initial phase of the research. For this reason, the first stage was dedicated to the familiarization with the center and its functioning. In the second stage of the project, besides researching, she also worked as an advisor, which allowed her to follow the participants' work in the SAC.

Considering the project's characteristics and aims, data was collected through observations, two semi-structured interviews with each participant, and learning diaries written by them:

- The researcher carried out random observations during a two-semester period. During the first one, observations were focused on obtaining detailed information about the SAC environment. And in the second one, the focus was on the participants' activities and their learning decisions in the center, taking into account the material selection and the way they use them. In order to document the information collected, notes were taken during every observation carried out.

- Two semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher with each of the participants, one at the beginning of the second semester and the other one at the end. The aim was to gather information regarding participants' motives, goals, feelings, and decisions about the experience of learning languages in the SAC.

- Participants were asked to keep a learning diary in which they wrote their own reflections regarding the languages they worked on, the activities, the materials, and the challenges faced, among other things. In order to do so, learners were given a notebook and a series of questions in Spanish that served as a guideline (see Figure 1); nonetheless, they were invited to openly write about any reflection, feeling, or comment they wished to express. The objective was to have more information about their decision-making and to have a deeper understanding of their learning experience.
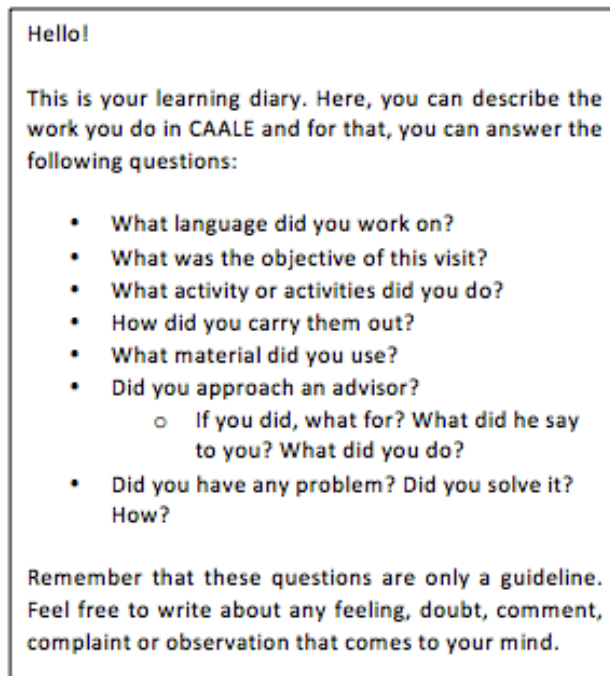
Hello!

This is your learning diary. Here, you can describe the work you do in CAALE and for that, you can answer the following questions:

- What language did you work on?
- What was the objective of this visit?
- What activity or activities did you do?
- How did you carry them out?
- What material did you use?
- Did you approach an advisor?
    - If you did, what for? What did he say to you? What did you do?
- Did you have any problem? Did you solve it? How?

Remember that these questions are only a guideline. Feel free to write about any feeling, doubt, comment, complaint or observation that comes to your mind.

Figure 1. Learning Diary Guidelines

Participants

The selection criterion was open and inclusive, considering men and women willingly attending the SAC, from different age groups and backgrounds. Also, it was not a requirement to be registered in any language course or to be learning one specific language, or more than one.

With this in mind, five SAC learners, three women and two men, were asked by the researcher to be part of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. The selection was made considering the regularity of their visits to CAALE. Their ages ranged between 20 and 30 years and had different professional and academic backgrounds (See Table 1). They were asked to regularly attend CAALE without a set schedule, participate in two interviews, and keep a learning diary of every visit to the center for a one-semester period. Participants accepted to be involved in the project without any sort of payment.

Table 1. Participants Characteristics

Name	Age	Description	Semesters as CAALE User (Prior to Study
Carla	25-30	University teacher not registered in a language course	1
Diana	20-25	Full-time language student registered in two language courses	1
Leonel	20-25	Nutritionist registered in a language course	1
Marco	20-25	Full time Nutrition Student registered in a language course	1
Vanessa	20-25	Language student registered in two language courses	4

Results

The following results were obtained based on the information gathered by 27 random observations, the two semi-structured interviews, and the analysis of the learning diaries written by each participant of the project. The analysis was done with a matrix developed on the data collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and later interpreted by the researcher. The results presented focus on the participants and the similarities and differences among them.

Participants

The information regarding the participants and their work in CAALE is briefly presented in Table 2.

Table 2. General Information about Participant*s*

Table 2. Participant's general information.				
Name	**Languages**	**Learning Objectives**	**Frequent Activities**	**Materials used**
Carla	English (Chinese and Japonese)	Improving speaking skills and reading and listening comprehension.	• Converstion clubs • Reading magazines	Magazines
Diana	French and English	Familiarization with the languages. Practice topics seen in her classes.	• Translating articles • Completing exercises related to the languages classes • Watching movies	*Lyricstraining.com* website, movies and textbooks
Leonel	English	Improving speaking skills, reading and listening comprehension. Revise his previous knowledge.	• Conversation clubs • Watching movies • Completing grammatical exercises linked to the languages classes	Movies and computers
Marco	English (interested in: Italian)	Improving reading comprehension.	• Reading comprehension activities in textbooks • Reading short stories and novels	Reading comprehension textbook and magazines. Atuthentic books.
Vanessa	Chinese, English and Spanish	In English, improving speaking ability. In Chinese, increasing vocabulary. In Spanish, improving writing skills.	• Practicing Chinese characters • Working on Spanish grammar • Watching movies in English	Exercises provided by the Spanish teacher and movies.

Similarities and differences among the participants
The learning experience in CAALE

As previously mentioned, in this project, the learning experience in a SAC refers to the unique and particular interaction between the learners and the center. This is shaped by the learners' decisions regarding their learning within the environment. The outcomes of this experience can be seen in their increased language performance and their personal growth.

The information obtained in the interviews, especially the second one conducted at the end of the project, suggested that for the participants, learning languages in CAALE was effective. Despite the feeling that it is necessary to continue working towards reaching their objectives, all participants felt they progressed in their language learning.

Vanessa, Marco and Leonel were able to identify situations in which they confirmed the work done in the SAC was effective. For instance, as they commented in the interviews, they obtained better grades in their classes, understood articles related to their area of studies more easily and stopped using a translator to understand movie scenes (See Table 3 for examples of increased language performance). For such reasons, they pointed out their interest in continuing studying languages in the SAC in addition to their language courses, since they considered it a helpful tool for their classes.

Table 3. Examples of Increased Language Performance

Participant	Examples
Carla	• Improved listening skills " Siento que escucho mejor el inglés, que le entiendo mejor cuando están hablando y todo, una que otra palabra sí me falla pero no es tanto como antes" " I feel I understand English better than before, when it is spoken, even if I miss a word"
Diana	• Better understands scientific articles in English "Estoy haciendo mi tesis y hay muchos artículos en inglés y antes batallaba mucho para traducir un parrafito y ahora es como que ¡guau!, igual si me fallan unas palabritas pero ahora es más fácil" "I'm working on my thesis and there are many articles written in English and before I struggled a lot to translate a Little paragraph, now it's like wow! I still miss some words but now it is easier" • Improved listening and reading comprehension skills in French "Por ejemplo, en las películas de que ay eso no dijo, dijo otra cosa, algo así y esta mal subtitulada eso sé y también igual en textos que venían palabras diferentes" "For example, in movies like ah! He didn't say that, he said something different! Or those subtitles are not right I know that now, also in texts I saw different words"
Leonel	• Understands movies and series without subtitles "El día de hoy no usé el traductor con los dos capítulos de '*Friends*' que miré y los comprendí" "Today I did not use the translator with the two '*Friends*' episodes I watched and I understood them" • Obtained better grades in tests "En los exámenes siempre hay preguntas del audio siempre sacaba dos bien, eso sí lo noté diferente de que empecé a sacar más mejores [resultados] en los audios" "In the tests there is always a listening exercise and I used to get 2 correct answers, this is something I noticed, I started getting better [results] in the listening sections"

Marco	• Improved reading comprehension skills "… identificaba más rápido la idea principal y aparte como que ya entendía más palabras se me hacía más fácil así como que había una palabra y podía distinguirla con el contexto" "… I identified the main idea faster and besides, it was like I could understand more words and it was easier I could get the meaning from the context" • Better understands nutrition articles "…más que nada cuando me dejaban leer textos en inglés en mi carrera sí me ayudó mucho porque ya como que comprendía mejor lo que leía" " … especially when I had to read texts in English in my career it helped me a lot because I was able to understand better what I was reading"
Vanessa	• Improved her previous results in a Chinese test "…todo lo que hago de chino siento que sí me sirve porque como creo que ya te había dicho hay dictados lo otra vez dictaron 100 caracteres fue un examen y me saqué 98 de tanto que le hago aquí con las vocabulario" "… everything I do regarding Chinese helps me because as I told you before [in my class] there are dictation tests and the other day we had one of 100 characters and I got 98 because of all I do here about vocabulary"

Working at CAALE not only allowed the participants to advance in their language learning, but according to their responses, it motivated them to personally grow by developing a sense of independence. Diana and Leonel considered that it contributed to help them focus on their objectives and on what is needed to achieve them. Moreover, they felt that the experience helped them realize the importance of continued study as expressed by Leonel in the following comments:

"Viniendo al CAALE también sentí como que como que más importancia al estudiar en autodidacta y no solamente para el inglés también para mi carrera"

"Coming to CAALE I also felt like it is important to study in a autodidactic way and not only to learn English but also for my career."

"Como que estar en el ambiente aquí otra vez de que todos estén también aprendiendo otro idioma ya inglés que es lo que la mayoría venimos a ver aquí sí me haces sentir

como que mayor compromiso más compromiso para seguir para aplicarme más en el estudio"

"[It's] like, being in this environment here again and everyone is also learning another language besides English makes me feel a greater commitment to continue to focus more on studying"

Regarding the adaptation process to the SAC environment and self-directed learning, all of the learners pointed out that it was difficult to adjust at the beginning but after a while they felt comfortable as they related to the rest of the users. This can be seen in the following comments made by Leonel and Marco respectively:

"Quizás la primera semana pero te das cuenta que todos vienen igual que tú no nada más no precisamente vienen con alguien viene solos normalmente o la mayoría y te das cuenta que muchos están solos haciendo su propio trabajo y ahí fue cuando me di cuenta es como cuando dicen sí tu haces algo tú sólo diferente pues te sientes extraño te califican de loco peor cuando muchos hacen la misma cosa diferente ya como que te sientes más cómodo"

"Maybe the first week but then you realize that everybody is here just like you, they normally come alone and they are doing their own work, and that's when I realized that it is like when you do something different alone you feel weird but when more people do it then you feel comfortable"

"Al principio sí se me hizo medio batalloso pero ya después como que ya le agarré la onda que es lo que tenía que hacer y ya se me hizo más fácil"

"At the beginning it was difficult but a while after I got the idea of what I had to do and then it was easier"

The opinion of all the participants about CAALE was positive. When asked about ways to improve CAALE, they suggested increasing the authentic material options such as movies and

books. Lastly, they suggested promoting the center to the rest of the university and the local community as they thought it was a helpful and effective tool to learn languages.

The activities and materials used

Each of the participants involved in this study carried out diverse activities which varied depending on: 1) the language they focused on, i.e. they did different tasks with every language they studied; 2) the particular objective. Since they had various goals, the participants worked in a way they thought would be convenient to reach them. Despite this, there were similarities in their performance in the SAC. For example, the most frequent activities were:

- completing exercises linked to their language classes and preparing for tests,
- watching movies and sitcoms, primarily in English with the purpose of improving their listening skills, was a common practice,
- reading magazines (authentic material) about diverse topics such as technology, entertainment, etc.,
- working with songs, translating articles or song lyrics, answering grammatical exercises in textbooks and websites, vocabulary searching in dictionaries and online translators, as well as playing board games with other users.

According to Carla and Leonel, the conversation clubs were of great help because they allowed them to improved their speaking and listening abilities. Besides, their confidence when using the language was boosted as they felt secure while they expressed themselves during the sessions. In contrast, for Marco, who concentrated on his reading comprehension in English, it was common for him to work with textbooks and magazines containing exercises.

Based on the participants' comments, working on these activities contributed to improved performance in their language courses resulting in better grades. Similarly, they enhanced their comprehension of spoken and written language since learners reduced the use of translation methods as they continued carrying out these tasks.

The materials were selected depending on the type of activity carried out. Participants used written and digital resources to accomplish their objectives such as the textbook used in their languages classes, books and magazines designed for the reading comprehension development, and finally, websites dedicated to the teaching and learning of languages. When

using authentic materials, they tended to work with audiovisual and written ones such as different genre movies and series, recent magazines and newspapers, in addition to novels and short stories. Participants also used the available resources in the SAC, for instance, the television and DVD players, worktables, reading spaces and the cubicles where the conversation clubs take place.

The selection of materials and resources implied an understanding of their purpose and use, as they were used appropriately. Nonetheless, it was constrained primarily to textbooks, movies, and reading materials, which suggests little knowledge of the possibilities offered in the SAC, as well as the different ways to use them to achieve a variety of objectives. Finally, it is relevant to mention that the participants did not request guidance of an advisor at any moment. It is considered that this lack of advising during the project played an important role in the learners' development and limited usage of the materials.

Discussion

This research aimed at providing answers regarding the way SACs learners work when they are in such centers and the way they start to direct their learning process, considering their interaction with the SAC elements, specifically, the activities carried out and the materials and resources used.

The results obtained from the study suggest that participants have a reasonable understanding of how to develop in the SAC environment, as they actively decided on the tasks to be done and the materials to be used. However, as identified in the learning diary entries and their comments in the interviews regarding advising, they did not make use of such services. In this sense, they worked on a 'no-help' view that limited the variety of activities done and the materials or resources used, since they commonly performed the same activities and did not diversify much. In their study, Domínguez-Gaona, López-Bonilla and Englander (2012) found a similar behavior in learners, in the sense that they did not seek out advising either, based on the idea that working autonomously meant developing without the help of others.

Participants also explained that the work done in the center helped them progress in their language learning since they got better grades in their language classes and understood spoken and written texts more easily. Language learning in SACs is considered, as expressed by Vanessa, Marco, Leonel and Diana, an effective tool to take advantage from while taking formal

language classes. In her study Herrera (2012) concludes that students partially accept self-access language learning because they still prefer to attend classes. This may suggest that there is a lack of learner formation in what the language learning in SACs implies, as well as, in learning to learn.

In regards to the adaptation process to the SAC environment and the self-direction of their learning, as noted in the learners' comments in the interviews, the beginning of the experience was difficult. Their perspective changed as soon as they grasped the purpose of a SAC and felt connected to the rest of the users.

Conclusion

This project was designed to describe, through five case studies, how learners in SACs work and their learning experience, considering how they adjust to the working mode, the activities done and the materials employed. The information obtained is based on a two-semester period, one of observations in the SAC about its functioning and another one following the performance of five participants learning different languages at the SAC of the University of Sonora. The results suggest that there seems to be an adaptation process by which the learner understands the working mode and starts making decisions regarding his or her own learning. However, more research about the transition from a formal class mode to SAC language learning is needed, with respect to the factors that influence the adjustment and the effects on the learners' performance.

As learners tend to behave in a similar way on every visit to the center and their use of the services, materials, and resources available is limited, it would be relevant to carry out research about the actual learner training in SACs and how it affects their development in the centers. Nonetheless, the outcomes of this study should not be generalized due to its particular design.

Notes on the contributors

Victoria Madrid is a Masters in Humanities student in the area of Foreign Language Teaching in the Universidad de Sonora. She also holds a BA in English Language Teaching from the same institution. Her research interests include learning autonomy, self-directed learning, and language learning in self-access centers.

E. Desirée Castillo Zaragoza is an Associate Professor at the Foreign Language Department of the Universidad de Sonora, Mexico. She received her PhD in Language Sciences at the Université de Lorraine, France. Her main research interests and publications are related to self-access centers, self-directed learning and multilingualism of learners working in Mexico.

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A Survey of Self-Access Foreign Language Centres in UK Higher Education Institutions: Format, Practices and Challenges in 2016

Marion Krauthaker, The University of Leicester, UK.

Abstract

This article reports on the observations and conclusions derived from a project which assessed self-access foreign language centres (SALCs) in UK higher education institutions between 2014 and 2016. The objective was to obtain a comprehensive picture of their structure, format and practices and uncover their current and anticipated challenges. The latter point was of particular interest in order to provide various stakeholders with useful pointers to accompany their potential reflections on SALCs and their future. The first stage was to conduct a field investigation of eleven facilities consisting of a visit of the structure and an in-depth interview of the managing staff. The data comparison and analysis then identified a number of emerging key points, such as space, equipment, staffing, mission, activities, financial resources and current arising issues. The findings presented here confirm the very uneven format of these facilities and reveal that, although their pedagogical benefits are widely accepted, SALCs currently encounter major challenges in terms of resources and support. This report can be of interest for a variety of stakeholders looking at the current position of SALCs in UK universities or having to reflect on the development or future of a facility.

Key words: self-access, higher education, survey

The idea to carry out a survey of self-access language centres (SALCs) in the UK arose from the observation that, in the second decade of the 21st century, great imbalances exist between these facilities in higher education institutions. While a handful of universities market state-of-the-art facilities, most SALCs seem to be found in the form of a couple of study rooms fitted with PCs or a few shelves and tables in the corner of a university library. In places, they simply do not exist at all or anymore. Research on SALCs has already explained this imbalance by the fact that self-access learning does not have the same seal of approval as classroom teaching and therefore lacks consistent backing (Gardner & Miller, 1999). Similarly, the move towards more virtual spaces through the impulse of new technologies and e-learning has been identified as a potential threatening force for physical self-access foreign language facilities (Mynard, 2012; Reinders, 2012). However, with widely proven and accepted pedagogical benefits and at a time where language contact hours are reduced to a bare minimum, it seemed important to push this investigation further. The following report describes the findings and conclusion drawn from a project carried out between 2014 and 2016 to obtain an up-to-date and comprehensive picture of SALC in UK universities and pinpoint avenues to reflect on their future.

The Project: Investigating a Range of Facilities

The methodology adopted was to carry out field investigations and conduct interviews to collect quantitative and qualitative data which would then be compared and analysed. From a simple Google search, I browsed over twenty UK modern languages departments and self-access foreign language facilities websites and selected a total eleven SALCs.[1] This sample aimed to reflect the variety of facilities identified by Gardner and Miller in their typology and therefore ranges from "large scale" (full dedicated buildings) to "small scale" (a few dedicated shelves in a library), as well as "controlled" (manned) and "uncontrolled" (unstaffed) facilities (Gardner & Miller, 1999, p. 65; p. 20). In the following report, these facilities will be referred to as SALC 1 to SALC 11 to preserve confidentiality. I visited each SALC and conducted an in-depth interview with the manager or person in charge. An interview with the former manager of a discontinued SALC was also carried out, which brought the number of interviews up to twelve. I then analysed and compared the collected data, extracted key elements, and, where necessary, contacted the managers by email for follow-up conversations or to clarify and develop some information.

In their typology of self-access, Gardner and Miller indicate that self-access is very flexible and therefore all facilities unique as they exit in a variety of environments and systems which suit their particular context (Gardner and Miller, 1999). Predictably, the visits confirmed that considerable variations in format exist between SALCs in UK universities. SALC 8, the smallest facility takes the form of shelves dedicated to language resources in a section of the main library demarcated by a different colour carpet. This reduced space contrasts greatly with that of SALC 3 which occupies an entire building and offers a series of activity rooms, language laboratories, classrooms, offices and social areas. SALC 5 also represents the other end of the scale as a full building with a large open space designed in corners and booth on the ground floor and with offices, classrooms and more specialised activity rooms adjacent and on the upper floors. The other facilities visited vary in size from a single medium size room (SALCs 4, 7 and 10), a series of rooms of various sizes (SALCs 1 and 11), large open halls (SALC 6) and large open spaces with adjacent small rooms (SALCs 2 and 9). In terms of staffing, apart from the uncontrolled facility (SALC 10) which has no staff, the facilities can be run by one single staff and by teams of up to twelve people.

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[1] The original sample included only six SALCs but I was eventually able to visit a total of eleven facilities thanks to the generous funding awarded by the University of Leicester 'College Of Arts, Humanities and Law Teaching Development Fund' and the Leicester Learning Institute 'Teaching Enhancement Fund' and 'Travel Fund'.

The visits allowed me to identify what can be considered as the 'basic equipment' offered by all eleven facilities (top part of Table 1). The management and maintenance of the basic equipment and resources, usually obtained as part of an internal or external start-up fund, is in all cases left to the appreciation of each manager. Because local decisions tend to be very different in each institution (depending on budget allocation, departmental structure, priority areas, languages catered for), a large variety of additional equipment and spaces can then be found in each facility (bottom part of Table 1). While some SALCs provide support solely for the languages taught as part of their degree (French, Italian and Spanish only for SALC 10 for instance), others cater for more than fifteen languages and are open to obtaining the necessary resources on demand for new languages (SALC 6). The supplementary equipment both reflects the focus of each facility and makes its originality.

Finally, eight SALCs reinforce their support to learners through a human presence in the form of a language learning advisor (bottom row of Table 1) who acts as a link between classroom time and semi-guided or independent learning. The importance of trained and dedicated advising staff in SALCs is demonstrated by the proliferation of literature on advising. Research has shown that, in light of individual learning differences and the multiplication of online resources, educational approaches have to diversify not only within the classroom, but also beyond and notably through a focus on advising (Mynard & Carson, 2012). In the 2015 SISAL special issue on 'Dialogue and Advising in Self-Access Learning', Mynard and Yamashita stress how dialogue with learners transforms the learning space as a "site of engagement" where reflection can happen (Yamashita & Mynard, 2015, p. 3). The space for refection not only creates the right conditions to encourage autonomous learning, but it is also central for the advisor to review the ever-evolving needs of learners and initiate suitable upgrades. As explained by one of the managers: 'The role of our counsellor in maintaining the attractiveness of the facility is also really significant, because [they are] the one who talks and spends time with our students every day and knows what's happening in their learning path' (SALC 6).

Table 1. A summary of Facilities and Support in the SALCs Surveyed

SALC		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Basic Equipment	Computer/Laptop cluster	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Study area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Printed resources (textbooks, dictionaries, newspapers, journals, magazines)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Audio resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Video resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Catalogue of resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Virtual extension (VLE site, Moodle or online presence)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Additional Equipment	Language lab/ area equipped with Sanako (software with various interactive tools for individual and group practice language)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Foreign channels (satellite, cable or internet)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	language software and programmes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
	Staffed entrance or desk	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		
	Separate group and individual study rooms/booths	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
	Social areas or separate rooms	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
	Separate library room/area	✓		✓			✓					✓
	Listening, speaking room/booth/area	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓		
	Interpreting room/suite			✓		✓				✓	✓	
	Separate television room/area	✓		✓		✓	✓					
	Cinema/film room			✓								
	DVD renting machine			✓								
	Editing audio/video studio			✓		✓				✓		
	Language Advisor	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

Environment and Activities: Creating a Community of Language Learners

Some of the facilities work actively on creating a language learning community within their walls to encourage students to spend more quality time within their walls. The literature on community-based access confirms the importance of this focus and attributes the rise in the number of regular users and an increase in achievement to "the staff's success in providing a relaxed and supportive atmosphere" and "creating a community of practice" (Thornton, 2016, p. 298). Following the social learning movement which places great importance on interdependence and interactions (Murray, 2017) and therefore the role of SALC as a "social learning space" beyond the access to physical resources (Allhouse, 2015; Murray & Fujishima, 2016), different strategies are indeed used to make the visited SALC an attractive educational and social hub that language learners become more and more eager to visit.

The first strategy used by the majority of centres concerns setting and location. Although this option is subject to building and space restrictions, seven of the centres visited have managed to gather all language related activities, people and spaces within the same area. Having a clearly demarcated 'language zone' on campus - whether on the same floor, building or within the same area – allows them to create a defined microcosm where the language is spoken, heard, read and written.

The second strategy observed is to tighten the links with the learners through the presence of dedicated staff. Although restricted by budget, all but one of the SALCs visited employ at least one member of staff whose role is to welcome and guide learners. In the smallest facilities, the same member of staff sometimes doubles up as language advisor, a role which, as mentioned in the previous section, is considered as crucial for the success of SALC facilities (Carson, 2015; Gardner & Miller, 1999; Thornton, 2016). More generally, case studies have stressed that the main issue to consider for the success of SALC as a learning space is institutional approval to ensure the funding for full-time academic staffing (Carson, 2015). The visits confirmed that it is indeed an absolute priority for ten of the centres who make no compromise on this and guarantee that their learners are always welcomed by approachable staff at all time.

Another important element in creating a lively community of language learners is to work on the ludic and social side of the facility (Table 2). Six of the SALCs visited offer a programme of activities organised to stimulate student interest in language. These range from language skills workshops, to daily news of the world gatherings, themed evenings, language cafés to innovative speed chatting and karaoke events. These extra-curricular events all

contribute in making language learning fun and, even more importantly, fostering connections between learners: 'the students come here to meet their friends too and, to me, the fact that they do other things here than learning a language is a success in itself' (SALC 3). To enhance the attractiveness of the facility, three SALCs provide students with additional social zones. These take the forms of rooms (SALCs 1 and 11) and open areas (SALC 3) with equipment such as coffee machines, kitchenettes, pool table, table tennis table or even board games. One of the managers notices how 'students hang out here and the place is just more alive. It is obvious to see that they enjoy coming here and find other things than just educational support' (SALC 11).

Table 2. Facilities Fostering a Community of Learners

SALC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Programme of language activities	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Dedicated staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Social hub	✓		✓								✓

Mission and Values: A Strong Pedagogical Rationale

When the number of language students increased in the 1990s, SALCs became one of the responses to the resourcing difficulties by providing mass learners with the opportunities and skills traditionally available to smaller groups of learners. By encouraging student resilience and independence, SALCs promote the development of personal learning strategies and metacognitive knowledge (White, 2008) and cater for a greater variety of learners' needs (Esch, 1994). The uncontrolled facility notwithstanding, all ten managers of a controlled facility state that their main objective is to support students in practicing and taking control of their language learning. In their own words, they all describe their centre as a dedicated and specialised environment where language is practiced among a physical community of learners and with specialised technologies, material and guidance. Through a SALC, students have more regular contact with the language and develop their own learning strategies with various degrees of independence. One of the managers explains that 'the centre recreates more authentic and playful possibilities to listen, speak and practice written language and gives confidence and regular practice to students' (SALC 5). The fact that SALCs give more motivation and chances for students to become successful in mastering a language was backed

up by an investigation carried out at the Chinese University of Hong-Kong, which found that 'there is a need for learners to come to a certain time, to a certain room' in order to practice and study their target language (Fung-Kuen Lai, 1994). The social interactions made possible by the SALC environment are also shown to constitute the 'right mix of linguistic, sociolinguistic, sociocultural and strategic competences' needed for proficiency to take place (Alvarez & Garrido, 2001). Although SALCs are not authentic native environments, they undeniably constitute an immersive space where language linguistic, cultural and social encounters can happen.

Arising Challenges

The first noteworthy issue arising from the in-depth interviews is that of the place and running of the facility within the home institution. Six of the centres visited function independently from the language unit of their institution. It is surprising to see that the majority of SALCs do not function in liaison with the institution's language degree provider, but this confirms that there is a "particular philosophy within language departments which does not count language teaching among its main concerns" (Ife, 1994, p. 69). Three of the managers expressed a desire to work on closer pedagogical links with their language department and yet only three of the facilities work in full connection with their language department. SALC 1 is for instance in charge of delivering the credit-bearing language classes of the modern language department. SALC 7 is fully integrated in the language degree curricula through summative independent work to be carried in the centre. This work is set through a system of compulsory hour of SALC attendance towards the completion of assessed language portfolio. Students are familiarised with the use and benefits of SALC 7 during induction sessions in year 1. Thereafter, the centre becomes a key place where they carry out independent or guided work, submit their language work, take their oral and aural tests and work in connection with the language counsellor.

A second issue stressed by nine of the managers is the lack of institutional and financial support. At one point or another, all ten controlled facilities have been threatened and have had to make important decisions to ensure their subsistence. In four cases, this has meant sacrificing the original link with their languages departments and finding ways to secure their own source of funding to avoid their discontinuation. One manager notes a 'discrepancy between how the centre is talked about, I mean very positively, and actual practical support, and by practical I mean financial. Our centre is presented as having great pedagogical importance, especially during recruitment events, and yet there is no real

investment in the facility' (SALC 2). Latest research on the management of SALCs has indeed pinpointed the inconsistency between the recognition of the pedagogical importance of language centres and the minimal effort made to define and provide training for the management (Gardner & Miller, 2014). A prime example of this is SALC 10 which was abandoned after a start-up grant helped set it up and has since run as an unmanned facility receiving no internal funding. The mission, pedagogical use, and potential future of SALC 10 have not been identified at any level, and yet the home language unit markets the facility as a key space for language studies during open days. Behind the scenes, this uncontrolled facility is surviving thanks to the good will and time of some of the languages tutors who organise its running with the help of students and try to place funding bids to maintain or improve the facility.

Overall, only three of the managers express that they feel confident that their facility will continue to exist and run in the future. SALC 3 is an unusual case in that it has benefitted from the full financial and moral support of its institution from the very start. The manager admits that this support is down to the individuals currently in charge in the immediate hierarchy, and explains that since they obtained a substantial start-up grant in the 2000s, the centre has been given a full dedicated building and ongoing funds to maintain it and employ staff on a permanent basis. Although the manager of SALC 3 has to make a case for additional one-off expenses, they usually obtain the funds needed to upgrade the facility according to learners' needs and wellbeing. For instance, expensive soundproof glass doors have recently been installed to create a sense of space and harmony between the various activity rooms, while preserving the confines of each one. This is a rare case where a UK institution fully supports a SALC. Indeed, other facilities are supported in spirit, but have a lot more trouble justifying their legitimacy. SALC 5 also runs with confidence in their future but has gone through a long series of steps to become an independent accredited business. It now runs semi-independently from its institution, a necessary step to secure its autonomy.

In comparison to the support of facilities which encourage autonomous experimentation and learning in other disciplines (such as labs in science departments), facilities such as SALCs in humanities disciplines struggle to convince and ensure their maintenance. All the facilities visited have had to find creative ways to ensure their continuation. Five of them have for instance joined forces with other departments, especially English language teaching units and therefore provide for English for international students, a more lucrative activity. Four facilities acquire their own budget by delivering a programme of

non-credited language classes and embark on advertising campaigns to ensure that students keep coming through their doors.

Because they do not benefit from central or national regulations, the majority of SALCs currently survive because they are backed by some individuals in the internal hierarchy. They are therefore at the mercy of restructuring. Changing institutional and planning priorities currently translate into the loss of valuable physical space and staff. The managers of four SALCs are concerned that this results in 'unstable and precarious positions' which are described as 'a day to day preoccupation for most of the staff employed' (SALC 4). The language advisor and sole remaining staff of SALC 8 feel that they still have a sense of identity as a language resource area, but explain that their facility was reduced over time as part of the institution's strategy to 'enhance the student experience'. Similarly, the former manager of a now disappeared structure indicates that 'financial reasons, and by that I mean the university wanting to cut costs on non-recruiting areas' (SALC 12) was the key reason to discontinue the facility.

In this context, accountability is a key challenge for structures whose mission is not to increase the student population but to support the learning of existing students. All the facilities have to demonstrate at institutional level that "the resources (both human and material) are being well used and that results are being achieved" (Gardner & Miller, 1999, p. 80). Four of the facilities visited conduct regular evaluations by seeking staff and users' feedback, keeping learners' profiles and tracking progress records. They do so not only to assess and adapt to learners' changing demands, but also to record and provide evidence of their achievements. As suggested by the former manager of a now disappeared centre, this is a way to claim the 'maybe invisible and yet very real role we play[ed] in giving students their confidence back and certainly in preventing them from falling behind' (SALC 12).

Even for the facilities which are not threatened by a reduction of their space, keeping a physical presence is becoming a challenge at a time where e-learning fosters radical changes. Most managers agree that they 'must participate in learners' training to use new technologies' (SALC 1) and that 'virtual extensions will widen the access and efficiency of the physical space' (SALC 2). Undeniably, SALCs must participate in training learners to use new technologies; however, they are aware that 'an online extension which makes sense pedagogically is a very different proposition than that of a virtual replacement for budgetary rationalisations' (SALC 6). As confirmed by a manager who is pushing towards the use of new-technologies, online extensions and even the in-house creation of online resources, 'the reduction or the discontinuation of a manned physical facility would be detrimental though,

because many pedagogical outcomes could not be obtained by a sole virtual space' (SALC 5). Making the case for the maintenance of a comfortable physical SALC is consequently a great challenge when institutions prioritise other areas and push towards the virtualisation of SALC on grounds that are often not pedagogical.[2]

Conclusions

From eleven visits and twelve in-depth interviews, this project has allowed me to better grasp the current landscape of SALCs and to identify the current challenges encountered by these facilities. SALCs are varied and pedagogically meaningful facilities: they constitute a dedicated and safe physical environment where students can study and practice a foreign language. By offering specialised technologies, resources, human guidance and a variety of learning methodologies they adapt to a wider-range of students and can be seen as champions for learning accessibility. They also have a strong cultural, intercultural and social role to play and have the potential to enhance a variety of personal and transferable skills for students. However, these units do not add to the student population. Their principal challenge currently lies in the uncertainty of their future or, at the very least, the energy to be spent in a constant battle to justify their existence. By exposing an urgent need to research, rethink and claim the values of SALC, this project hopes to become a useful starting point for further research on SALC. It should also be of interest for a variety of stakeholders looking at the current position of SALC in UK universities or having to reflect on the development or future of a particular facility.

Notes on the Contributor

Marion Krauthaker is a Lecturer in French and Francophone Studies. Originally specialising in gender studies and literature, her position of Languages Coordinator at the University of Leicester led her investigate Modern Languages as a discipline and, in particular, pedagogical issues linked with the learning of a language in the current neoliberal educational and political UK context.

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[2] A more extensive critical evaluation of the place of SALCs in the midst of the ongoing tension between pedagogical needs and neo-liberal imperatives is currently carried out by the author and will be published in 2018.

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Social Language Learning Spaces: Globalization Glocalized[i]

Garold Murray, Okayama University, Japan

Mariko Uzuka, Okayama University, Japan

Naomi Fujishima, Okayama University, Japan

Abstract

In this era of globalization, Japanese universities will have to accommodate an increasing number of local students wishing to learn foreign languages and they will also have to welcome more international students to their campuses. While universities will undoubtedly take steps to ensure that both groups have positive educational and intercultural experiences, we contend that it is also incumbent upon them to implement measures designed to facilitate the adaptation of international students to Japanese society. In this article, we examine the role social learning spaces can play in helping universities respond to these challenges. We argue that these facilities can make an invaluable contribution by supporting language learning and cross-cultural acclimatization for both international and Japanese students. The term social learning spaces refers to places where students can come together in an informal or quasi-formal environment in order to learn from and with each other. To illustrate our points, we draw on the data from a five-year ethnographic inquiry carried out at one such facility on the campus of a large national university. After describing the social learning space, outlining the study, and tracing the theoretical orientation guiding the interpretation of the data, we focus on the benefits social learning spaces can afford international students wishing to improve their language skills and adapt to Japanese society. To conclude, we reflect on how social learning spaces can support the process of glocalization by making local universities more globalized places.

Keywords: *Affordances, complex systems, emergence, glocalization, Japanese as a foreign language, social learning spaces*

At universities across Japan there is a drive towards globalization. Some universities are struggling to understand what this means in terms of educational practices and day-to-day operation. One thing is clear: globalization will mean welcoming more international students to their campuses. Accepting international students into programs and providing courses for them is one thing; however, universities will also have to take steps to ensure that these students have positive educational and personal experiences while in Japan. In this article, we examine the role social learning spaces can play in facilitating the globalization of Japanese universities and the adaptation of international students to Japanese society.

Social learning spaces are places where learners can come together to learn with and from each other. In the case of social learning spaces for language learning on the campuses of Japanese universities, they are places where Japanese and international students can meet, make friends, practice their target languages and gain firsthand knowledge about other cultures and their people. They are important because they embody globalization being realized through action on a local level, a unique form of glocalization.

Over a five-year period, we carried out an ethnographic inquiry into a social learning space, the L-café – and its predecessor, the English Café – located on the campus of a large national university in Japan. We have been investigating this environment by conducting interviews with students, administrators and teachers, and by having senior students trained as research assistants carry out participant observation. As a result, our data consists of roughly 150 interview transcripts and reports documenting over 1000 hours of participant observation. The results of a thematic analysis of this data has served as the basis for numerous conference presentations and publications in which we examined how the learning opportunities available in this environment benefitted Japanese who wanted to learn to speak English (Murray & Fujishima, 2013; Murray, Fujishima & Uzuka, 2014; Murray, Fujishima & Uzuka, forthcoming). In this article we focus on how participation in the social learning space can benefit international students wishing to improve their Japanese language skills. However, we begin by describing the learning space and discussing some of the theoretical notions that guided our interpretation of the data. To conclude, we consider the possible implications for language learning on campuses in Japan and the globalization of Japanese universities.

The L-café

The L-café had a very modest beginning as the English Café, a narrow one-room venue. The vice president responsible for English education had a vision of a space where Japanese students could practice the language in a relaxed, comfortable environment (Tahara, 2016). As a result, the English Café opened in 2009 adjacent to a large, busy food café located on the ground floor of a building dedicated to student services and club activities. Although the room was not that small, several tables surrounded by chairs, a large screen television, shelving for language learning materials and laptop computers, an administrative area for the manager and her

student helpers, all conspired to make the room seem cramped and crowded. One fortunate feature was that most of the wall space was glass which made the room airy and bright. Because Japanese students would need someone to practice their English skills with, international students were invited to drop in. Soon the English Café was a popular meeting place for international and Japanese students.

Although students came to relax, chat with their friends, have lunch and even study, most came for the weekly English lessons. These lessons took the form of peer-taught, non-credit-bearing, small-sized classes. They were taught by international students or Japanese students who had a good command of English and understood the difficulties the learners faced. Because the classes were not credit-bearing, they lacked the pressure usually engendered by tests or homework assignments. They became hugely popular because of the informal friendly atmosphere.

In addition to the classes, a series of events was planned throughout the year. These events included a welcome party for the international students arriving in October, a Halloween Party, a Christmas Party, a Hanami Party (cherry blossom viewing party), and eventually a going away party for the international students and graduating Japanese students. In between these occasions, students were encouraged to propose and organize other events – such as an ice-cream party – and to participate in cultural activities in the local community.

Over the years, the English Café expanded as it attracted more and more students. Eventually, it moved to a much larger space and transformed into the L-café, a multilingual, multi-cultural facility. Throughout the years, students have been encouraged to take photographs of the day-to-day activities, the special events, and the people who have given life to these facilities. The result is a repository of photos documenting the transformation the café has undergone. A picture is worth a thousand words so we invite you to visit the L-café website or Facebook page for photos of the spaces, the people and the events (see endnotes for details[ii]).

Thoughts on Learning

For the students who were regular visitors to the English Café and later the L-café, mustering the courage to walk through the door into this strange, new environment was the first step on a journey to a new world of cross-cultural friendships and unimagined learning opportunities (Nakamoto, 2016). For us as

teachers and researchers, investigating their experiences, we, too, embarked upon a metaphorical odyssey that led us to see learning, learners and learning environments in new ways.

Shortly after its opening, we saw the English Café as a community of practice. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). What we observed were groups of students who shared a common goal, i.e., learning a foreign language, and who deepened their knowledge and expertise as they interacted with more established members of the English Café, participated in a wide range of activities, and gradually became valued members of the community.

When we began our study, the participants' references to "space" and "place" in the first round of interviews prompted us to explore these constructs. We were surprised to discover in the literature on human geography that places are social constructions (Cresswell, 2004). By this we mean that spaces are transformed into places by people carrying out actions in a particular space, and subsequently talking about this space and defining it as a place where these activities occur. Through a more careful analysis of the data, we realized that how people define a space will influence their decision to enter and what they do inside (Murray, Fujishima, &Uzuka, 2014). For example, Japanese students defined the English Café as a place where they had to speak English, which prevented many from entering because they feared their proficiency was inadequate.

However, the focal point of our study was not individual learners per se but rather the English Café as a learning environment. Therefore, we adopted an ecological approach in which we viewed the English Café as an ecosocial system (Lemke, 2002) and the learners as part of the system or environment. This approach enabled us to work with two key concepts: affordances and emergence.

By examining learners' various activities, interactions and relationships, we sought to identify affordances that gave rise to opportunities for language learning. Affordances are opportunities for action as they are perceived by the individuals in an environment (Gibson, 1986). They are not necessarily properties of the environment; rather, they emerge as learners interact with the environment (van Lier, 2004, p. 62). Emergence, another key concept of the ecological perspective, takes place when relatively simple elements in an environment interact and reorganize – or self-

organize – into more complex systems, patterns, or behaviours. When learners are active in a language learning context, affordances emerge through their engagement (van Lier, 2004).

Over time we came to see the L-café as a complex, dynamic ecosocial system. According to Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008), the defining feature of a complex system is that its behaviour emerges from the interaction of its components. In the case of the L-café, its character is determined by the interaction of the people in the environment. They come and go: international students go back to their home countries, Japanese students graduate, and new faces appear supporting the emergence of different behaviors and ways of interacting. The L-café as a complex, dynamic system is always changing, always in a state of becoming.

Learning at the L-café

Over the five-year period that we did our study, unless you walked into the English Café or L-café when one of the small peer-taught classes was being held, you might not see any of the vestiges of learning normally associated with a university setting. This has prompted at least one administrator to pose the question: Where does the social stop and the learning begin? We contend that his question is flawed because it is based on the assumption that learning and social activity are binary opposites. Our research, supported by Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory and situated learning theory (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991), suggests that the learning and the social are one. An examination of the learning opportunities available to international students in the English Café and the L-café illustrates this crucial point.

A key question to ask is "what Japanese language learning opportunities were available to the international students?" As Allan, an American student, noted in an interview, "the playing field was not level" because the whole point of the English Café and the main thrust of the L-café has been to promote English language learning. For example, while a wide variety of peer taught English classes are offered, none are available in Japanese. Therefore, in the absence of any structured learning opportunities, what possibilities were there for international students to improve their Japanese language skills?

The answer to this question lies in Allan's comment that the L-café is "a place you use for social networking…through that social networking your Japanese can

become better". Other students we interviewed offered insight into how this worked. Ahmed, a Kuwaiti PhD student who worked at the English Café, explained, "When I make new Japanese friends when I am in English Café, I talk to them in English, but outside, if we go out for dinner, we talk in Japanese. And that, of course, improves my Japanese." Once international students and Japanese become friends there is a tendency for them to communicate in Japanese. Allan noted, "Whenever my friends come to English Café now, we mostly talk in Japanese." The key for international students is to make friends with their Japanese peers.

Providing international and Japanese students with a place to meet is perhaps the prime affordance of the L-café. Lena, a Serbian graduate student, made the point that "before the English Café, there was no place where Japanese students could meet foreign students, except for example, if you belonged to the same *kenkyushitsu* [research lab], but there's no opportunity to talk to them." Similarly, Ahmed said, "I was a little bit disappointed, I'm in Japan, difficult to make friends. But after English Café opened, I met many friends…and we practice both languages."

Ahmed's reference to practicing both languages raises an important point. There are two categories of international student on campus: there are English-speakers and non-English-speakers. For the international students, whose first language is not English, the L-café provided opportunities to improve both their English and Japanese. Cheng, a Thai student, made the comment that with "more Japanese students coming to L-café to practice English, I have more chance to speak in English." Asked about opportunities to improve his English, Kevin, a French-speaking exchange student explained, "I met lots of people from America, or any English-speaking countries, so it helped me improve my English or broaden my horizons by having more vocabulary." Another French national, whose double major was Japanese and English, said she chose to come to this particular university because of the opportunities the L-café afforded for learning both languages.

Students also noted the opportunity to learn "real" English and "natural" Japanese. When asked how she benefitted from the L-café, Cheng said,

> First of all, I can make a lot of friends and by talking to them my Japanese improved a lot. I can feel that the first day I arrive here, my Japanese that I use is like written form. And after I keep talking with Japanese friend, my Japanese become more regular, more common and natural.

Answering the question, "What does the English Café offer students in addition to the regular courses they have available to them?" Rick, a Chinese student from Hong Kong, replied, "Real English." He elaborated by saying, "You can't really learn English through classes. Well, I mean, you can, but it's a different type of English." He added that when students come to English Café and make friends with English speakers, they have a chance to learn real English.

Learning to speak a language as it is used by people in everyday contexts requires gaining cultural knowledge and understanding. Dongik, a Korean student, commented on how he benefitted from participation at the English Café:

> I've been studying Japanese for four years, but even like I'm very fluent, doesn't mean I can communicate with Japanese well, 'cos, I should know their culture. In Café I always had many friend there so they teach – I could learn their background in Japan, US or Britain, not only the language but the background culture. That kind of experience couldn't be learned on the textbook.

When asked if she thought the English Café could exist without the international students, Lena, said,

> It's not just the English or the pronunciation – it's the whole cultural exchange thing. Because most of the time that's what people are talking about: What about this in your country? What about that? Can you show me something about this or that? It's not just language.

The L-café and the previous English Café provide a forum for intercultural exchange and opportunities to learn about other cultures firsthand.

For the international students, the English Café and the current L-café have served as the gateway to the Japanese culture and community. Ahmed notes that one of the advantages of coming to the English Café was the opportunity to learn about and participate in local events, which broadened his knowledge and understanding of the local urban community and Japan. Similarly, Lena said, "I always drop by to say 'hello' or to see what's happening or to check the board with the events…. I know that's the place to be if you wanna gather some new information." Elsewhere, Lena noted, "When you know there are other people in the same situation as you and you can all help each other out… when these connections between foreigners and Japanese students are made… they have Japanese friends so they are like part of this Japanese community."

Helping friends out is a key feature of the kind of learning that takes place in these facilities. For example, students help each other with homework assignments.

Cheng said, "When I have to write essay or presentation, I get help from my Japanese friends. When I have kanji that I don't understand, I can ask them also." Similarly, Kevin said, "I receive proofreading in my Japanese papers because my Japanese is far from being perfect. I don't have the same vocabulary as Japanese people do." An important feature of this help is that it is reciprocal. Commenting on the help he provides his Japanese friends, Kevin said, "I'm not correcting the paper myself. I'm just guiding them through the process." Kevin's comments suggest that students are getting help within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), a metaphorical learning space in which assistance from someone with more expertise enables learners to improve their performance and gain skills and knowledge. When learners get help with something today, they will be able to do it on their own tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978).

Getting help within their zone of proximal development enables learners to transition from other-regulation to self-regulation, in other words, through this process, learners become more autonomous (Kohonen, 2001). Speaking about the kind of help learners give each other, Lena said, "One of the reasons why I tell them you can do this or you can do that and give them information is because I want them to know and to learn and to be able to do it alone later." Getting the help they need when they need it promotes learner autonomy.

Autonomy in the form of learners' freedom to exercise their agency has been a key feature of both the English Café and the L-café (Murray & Fujishima, 2013). When Rick was asked, "What was the best thing about the English Café?", he answered, "You can go at any time and leave whenever you want." Similarly, Lena said the best thing was "this lack of pressure". Commenting on what the English Café offered students in addition to the regular university courses, she said,

> If you enter the English Café, you can exit anytime. You don't have to stay there or you don't have to go there every day. Or, also nobody will mind if you make a mistake, so maybe the freedom…. You can do whatever you want…you decide, you set your own time and your rules, in a way.

Elsewhere we have argued that the autonomy the learners enjoyed at the English Café and later at the L-café was actually a crucial affordance that enabled them to act on the learning opportunities they perceived when they saw fit and in ways that suited their sense of self and personal learning styles (Murray & Fujishima, 2013).

Implications

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So, what are the implications of all this? First and foremost, we need to recognize that making a place for oneself in a foreign country and culture is extremely challenging. For this reason, we need social learning spaces where newcomers – international students and Japanese students perhaps new to university life – can meet, become friends and support each other pedagogically and emotionally. Secondly, within these facilities we need to give students metaphorical space – understood as the freedom to exercise their agency – so they can interact, engage with the community as it emerges and, in doing so, learn. Thirdly, as educators, we need to make space in our conceptual understanding of learning in institutional settings for the notion of learning beyond the classroom. Learning languages and cultures is intrinsically social. Therefore, we need learning spaces that facilitate the emergence of learning opportunities by enabling learners to exercise their agency as they interact with each other and engage with the environment.

Conclusion

As complex dynamic systems, social learning spaces are all about change. They change from semester to semester and from day to day as international students and Japanese students come and go. They also change for individual students depending on their level of engagement. Asked how the L-café was a different place from when she started coming a year earlier, Cheng responded:

> I feel I'm involving more than last semester. I feel like it's completely new place for me and I feel closer to the people there. I feel like everyone, or even me, sharing that place like an owner. It's like everyone can take care of it – have to take care of it.

Through her engagement, not only is the L-café a changed place for Cheng, but she has a sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility for the common good.

While how students experience a social learning space can change; conversely, experiencing a social learning space can change students. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, we have collected stories from international and Japanese students in which they write about how their experiences at the English Café and the L-café changed their lives (Murray & Fujishima, 2016). However, change does not stop there: social learning spaces can change the face of the institution.

Social learning spaces have a key role to play in the transformation of universities into more globalized places. When we asked Lena if she saw any

evidence of the English Café changing people's lives, she gave an impassioned response:

> I think it's changed a lot of people – many lives so far – because before English Café opened, I was in Okayama for six months and I felt really isolated. I mean, there was no place you can meet people who you can talk in English with…. We met so many people since English Café opened. Before that, it was really nothing was going on. There were none of these events where we could all hang around…. And now, also the whole Okayama University looks like a more international place… it [English Café] provided this international character to Okayama University.

By providing a place for international students and Japanese students to meet, become friends, and learn from each other, the university is enabling a process whereby both groups become more globalized citizens. In return, their engagement in this complex dynamic system is making the university a more globalized place. Social learning spaces are important because they facilitate glocalization – the enactment of globalization on a local level through day-to-day activities.

Notes on the contributors

Garold Murray is associate professor in the Center for Liberal Arts and Language Education at Okayama University. He is editor of the book *The Social Dimensions of Learner Autonomy* (2014), and co-editor of the books *Social Spaces for Language Learning: Stories from the L-café* (2016, co-edited with Naomi Fujishima), and *Space place and autonomy in language learning* (2018, co-edited with Terry Lamb).

Mariko Uzuka is a professor in the Center for Global Partnerships and Education at Okayama University. She established and managed the L-café and its predecessor, the English Café. Currently, she is in charge of advising international students, but continues to work closely with L-café.

Naomi Fujishima is a professor in the Center for Liberal Arts and Language Education at Okayama University. She currently serves as vice-president of JALT, the Japan Association for Language Teaching. She is co-editor of *Social Spaces for Language Learning: Stories from the L-café* (2016, co-edited with Garold Murray).

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[ii] For photographs of the LC, people and events, visit the L-café on Facebook: type 'L-café Okayama University' into the search window, or type the full address into your search engine: https://www.facebook.com/lcafeokayamauniversity/

How to Support Students in Selecting Graded Readers

Amber Barr, Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan

Phoebe Lyon, Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan

Abstract

Learner autonomy, and giving students the ability to select their own learning materials as a way to encourage them to take charge of their own learning, is now a major focus in education (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). However, students may not always feel confident making selections that were once made by their classroom teachers. The authors analyzed data from student surveys to determine possible factors that contribute to and influence students' graded reader selections. Results indicate that although some learners are able to make selections that meet their expectations, there are almost as many who are struggling to do so. In this report, the authors' aim is to offer suggestions as to how learners can be assisted to improve success in graded reader selection.

Keywords: extensive reading, self-regulated reading, autonomous readers, self-access learning center, learner autonomy

Extensive reading, or graded reading, is an important reading component for learners of additional languages. It allows for them to read a variety of genres, read large amounts of simple text within their current reading ability and for them (as opposed to the teacher) to choose their own material (Waring, 2000). The latter is important because encouraging learner autonomy through giving students the opportunity to select their own learning (reading) materials assigns students an active role in their learning process (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). However, choosing books can be daunting and students may often feel overwhelmed by the choices they are faced with. Furthermore, it is not always apparent how learners independently approach the task. The purpose of this report is to draw upon some preliminary research investigating how students select learning materials in order to help them to do so more efficiently.

Literature Review

Extensive reading is beneficial for learners since it allows them to meet language in a natural context, helps them to develop reading fluency and speed, assists with vocabulary attainment and has been shown to increase learner motivation and enjoyment of reading (ERF, 2011). Furthermore, Day and Bamford (2002) state that by allowing

learners to select materials that they want to read at their own ability level and that is of interest to them, learners are able to also increase their reading confidence. However, Waring (2000) states that in order for reading fluency and confidence to develop, learners need to read at or below their comfort level. Since selecting material may prove to be a daunting task, Day and Bamford (2004) recommend that learners use books or magazines that have been specifically written for language learners at different ability levels. Graded readers are therefore a suitable choice for language learners. Thus, extensive reading is often referred to as graded reading (Waring, 2000).

According to the ERF (Extensive Reading Foundation), students are best at judging their own comfort zone with respect to their level (2011). In fact, in literature showing how graded readers have been implemented into university level reading/writing courses in Japan, studies have often focused on the need for learners to make autonomous choices (Cheetham, Elliot, Harper, & Sato, 2017; Harrold, 2013; O'Loughlin, 2012). Harrold's (2013) study indicated that when students self-selected books, they tended to enjoy them more than the class sets that had previously been assigned by their classroom teachers. However, even after being given an orientation to graded readers, when given the power to choose, it remains unclear how learners make decisions when they self-select books or how they make subsequent choices. This appears to be an important area to investigate.

Background

Several years ago, an extensive reading program was introduced into the English and International Communications Department curriculums at a private Japanese university to help students become more autonomous readers. After an orientation to graded readers in 2015, we (the authors - two teachers of the course) asked students in three freshman classes to choose their own graded readers. We limited the students' choices to graded readers for the following reason: editors and publishers control the vocabulary and grammar that readers will be exposed to, with higher frequency vocabulary and a close range of grammar at low levels and lower frequency words and more complex grammar at higher levels (Lake & Holster, 2014). The importance of selecting a level that students felt comfortable with was stressed to students in all three classes since it is unlikely that learners will develop into fluent readers with selections

that are above their current ability level (Waring, 2000). Students in all three classes were required to self-select a new book at least every two weeks for a total of five books. Waring (2000) and Nation (2009) suggest that this is a good timeframe in order for students to receive enough exposure to sustained reading and repetition of language. To determine how students felt about the book selections that they were making, students were asked to complete pre- and post-reading questions.

How Students Viewed Graded Readers

Responses to the research questions (see Appendix) indicated that students enjoyed the books for several reasons: the books were interesting, easy to summarize, an enjoyable genre, an appropriate level, or funny, they had an unpredictable ending or touching scenes, or the students learned new information. Similarly, there were many reasons given for books that the students did not enjoy: the books were too difficult, too easy, dark, too long, too short, or not like the students had expected (or not like the movie), or had disturbing content, a predictable ending, or shallow content.

How Students Made Subsequent Material Choices

Whereas most responses indicated that many students were aware of factors to consider in making a selection that might better meet their expectations, some responses indicated that learners were unsure of how to improve their choices.

Examples of criteria that students indicated they would consider when making subsequent choices were choosing a higher or lower level, trying a new genre, choosing based on a friend/ learning advisor/ teacher recommendation, or making a selection based on a story that they were already familiar with or on a movie that they had seen. A unique idea employed by one student was to look for a popular book based on how many times it had been borrowed. This approach was taken after two disappointing previous decisions. In this instance, the student liked the book and, more importantly, had found a suitable level.

Unfortunately, students did not always take their own advice and ignored the criteria they had specified for themselves when making their next selection. One student almost always commented that they would look at the blurb/cover for their next book selection. However, the student continued to base their choices on familiar stories,

movies they had seen or on friend recommendations. This student's expectations were never really met; having finally decided to review the cover and read the blurb for the final book they chose, they found the book to be a good level. Unfortunately, they also commented that it was too short.

Another student indicated that for a subsequent selection they would choose a specific genre, but they instead chose a book based on a friend's recommendation. This student was ultimately dissatisfied with the level of the book. Surprisingly, it seemed that when students chose books that were recommended (either by a friend, classmate, teacher or learning advisor), results were mixed when it came to how the selection met their expectations. The books were either interesting and a good level match, or were too challenging. This indicates that choosing a book requires more consideration than just selecting one because it was recommended, once again showing the possibility that students are not necessarily aware of their personal interests and levels. These are clearly points that need to be highlighted to students.

Although students were given the option to stop reading and select a new book per cycle if they were not happy with their choices, few students took advantage of this. Abandoning a book if it is either too difficult or not of interest is an important aspect of self-regulated learning (Lake & Holster, 2014). Since there was a question on the survey that related to this, and there were classroom reminders, it is unfortunate that students who were not making choices that met their expectations did not take advantage of this option more often. This is an option that could be further reinforced.

Developing an Awareness of How to Choose Materials

The results varied as to when students began making choices that consistently met their expectations. Students that were successful throughout the selection process often looked at the title, read the summary and made their selections based on genre. Students that were mostly successful with only a single unsuccessful choice midway through either quickly realized their dissatisfaction and chose a new book to read instead or were able to return to making successful selections with their next books. They often did this by returning to earlier criteria they had used, notably, reading the blurb and checking the level.

It should be noted that students who were able to make the transition from choices that did not meet their expectations to ones that did accomplished this by their third choice. For those learners who were only starting to make more successful choices toward the end of the semester, it was clear from their survey responses that it was only at this late point that they started looking at book features such as the blurb or level. Although they had been through an orientation, some students did not take heed until this late stage.

Students that were inconsistent in meeting their expectations often struggled with choosing the appropriate level, mostly oscillating between being too challenging or too easy. Other reasons for choices not meeting expectations were that choices were 'not what they had expected (i.e. not like the movie), too predictable, or shallow'. Furthermore, students whose choices did not meet their expectations typically made their selections based on the title, the picture on the front cover and recommendations, but only occasionally read the blurb and/or considered the level. One exception was a student who consistently read the blurb and checked the level, but was still unable to make choices that met their expectations. The student's challenge was finding a genre in the graded readers that suited their interest.

Although some students were able to delve into multiple genres with success, it seemed that they were perhaps more aware of the level that was comfortable for them and the subjects that interested them. Unfortunately, for many of the learners who chose from multiple genres, it appeared that they were not considering levels; therefore, their feedback often indicated that the book they had chosen was an inappropriate level. This would indicate that students need more assistance/ reminders when determining the levels and genres that are most suitable for them.

Interventions for Helping Students to Make Effective Choices

We believe that it would be beneficial to review book elements (e.g. level, title, genre, the blurb) in class, if not prior to each and every book selection that students make, at least periodically. Furthermore, if students in classes that have undergone an orientation to selecting graded readers are struggling with making successful choices, it can only be assumed that students who have not had such an orientation might also struggle, perhaps more so. Consequently, it might be beneficial to have information

available in the graded reader areas in SALCs and libraries that highlights important factors for selecting graded readers such as the genre, reading the blurb and reading the first page to check the level. Additional signs could be posted that clearly highlight the level of books, taking into consideration the differences often found between the different publishing houses, as well as signs reminding learners to ask SALC staff for advice when selecting a book. SALC staff could help learners think more carefully about what they need to consider when selecting a book. Another important role for SALC advisors, along with the classroom teachers, is to stress the importance of taking the time to review books, even if a particular book has been recommended or is famous/familiar.

Conclusion

Although students tend to prefer making reading choices when it comes to extensive reading, it is clear that selecting a book that matches one's expectations is not an easy task. Whilst some learners are able to immediately make successful self-selections, there are some learners who struggle and who are not as aware of their needs as a learner. It would benefit all learners making book selections to be able to refer to an easily accessible guide each and every time they make selections. Having one close at hand in the relevant section of the SALC or library would be useful. Learners clearly need added guidance and constant reinforcement on the path to becoming autonomous readers.

Notes on the contributors

Amber Barr is a Senior Lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies, Japan. Her main research interests are extensive reading and learner autonomy.

Phoebe Lyon is a Principal Lecturer for Curriculum and Assessment at Kanda University of International Studies, Japan. Her research interests include learner autonomy, materials development and assessment.

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Appendix

Student Reflection Questions

1. Why did you choose the book? Explain.

Q1, なぜその本を選んだのですか？理由を説明しなさい

2. In which ways did this book meet or not meet your expectations? Explain.

Q2. どんな意味でこの本はあなたの期待に応え（あるいは期待を裏切り）ましたか？説明しなさい。

3. Did you start a book that you didn't finish? If yes, why didn't you finish that book?

Q3, 本を最後まで読み終えずに終わりましたか？もしそうならば、その理由はなんですか？

4. What will you consider when choosing the next book?

Q4, 次の本を選ぶ際には、どこに着目しますか？

Peer Tutoring: Active and Collaborative Learning in Practice

Rachael Ruegg, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Taku Sudo, Aarhus University, Denmark.

Hinako Takeuchi, McGill University, Canada.

Yuko, Akita International University, Japan.

Abstract

The mandate of self-access centers is to provide a venue, materials and support for self-directed learning; taking learning outside of the classroom. The Academic Achievement Center (AAC), on which this paper focusses, is a support service offered within a self-access center at a university in Japan. Students who receive support do so on a completely voluntary basis, in a self-directed effort to support and enhance their classroom learning. This paper was written as a collaboration between the coordinator of the AAC and three peer tutors, who were employed in the center. At the time of writing, one of the authors was a student in the Graduate School of Japanese Language Teaching Practices, while two were undergraduate students in the Faculty of International Liberal Arts; taking their learning outside of the self-access center and sharing it with a wider audience. This paper was motivated by the desire on the part of the peer tutors to share what we are doing in the AAC with those thinking of, or in the process of, creating a tutoring center, especially in Japan. Additionally, it was written to give readers an insight into how a tutoring center in an international university in Japan is run, as well as its successes and challenges. The paper itself is a co-authored publication by a professor and a few student-tutors, representing the vast possibilities of active and collaborative research which can be done in a university setting.

The Context

Akita International University is an international university where all classes throughout the university are conducted in English. The curriculum begins with an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, in which students can polish their English capability before progressing into the undergraduate curriculum. Additionally, there are a small proportion of incoming students (up to 10% in any year), who enter the university at a proficiency level which enables them to skip EAP and start studying in the undergraduate program straight away.

After completing their EAP requirements, students move on to introductory level courses in a wide range of disciplines within the Basic Education (BE) program. This program is based on the U.S. university model, in which students should take compulsory

courses in a wide range of disciplines before moving on to study in their major area. Students typically study in the BE program for a period of one year.

Upon leaving the BE program, most students go abroad for a period of one year to study at one of 174 partner institutions. Studying abroad for a period of one year is a graduation requirement at the university. Prior to studying abroad, students are required to complete certain core BE classes, maintaining a GPA of 2.5 (the equivalent of a B- average) as well as achieving a TOEFL ITP score of 550 (or the equivalent score in TOEFL iBT (80) or IELTS (6.5)). The study abroad partnerships basically involve an exchange of one outbound student for one inbound student. This means that a large number of undergraduate students on campus at any time are short-term international exchange students. Three hundred and seventy-seven inbound students studied at Akita International University in the 2015 academic year.

Finally, students choose one of the two majors; Global Studies (GS) or Global Business (GB), and take courses in their major area as well as completing a graduation thesis on a topic of special interest within their major area. The curriculum appears to offer a variety of challenges to students, from the high English language proficiency required to successfully study at the university, to the wide range of subjects students are required to study and the strict GPA and standardized test requirements for study abroad.

The Active Learning Support Center

The Active Learning Support Center (ALSC), which was established with a focus on active learning, consists of three centers with different purposes: Language Development and Intercultural Studies Center (LDIC), Academic Career Support Center (ACSC), and the AAC. Peer tutoring takes place at the AAC, which is discussed below. ALSC provides support for self-directed and autonomous learning, and it has become an important part of learning environment of the university. This center drives the university toward a learning-centered environment.

The AAC offers peer tutoring to support students with their course content, and this center has been successful in supporting students' academic achievement. The academic support offered at the AAC is not limited to language courses, but it covers courses of mathematics, natural science, and standardized English proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS. In the AAC peer tutoring, trained tutors support tutees with the focus on tutees' development into more autonomous learners. Therefore, the AAC can be considered the ideal environment for practicing peer tutoring.

Procedures within the AAC

From its establishment in 2009, until this paper was written in 2015, the AAC employed 181 students as peer tutors. In the early years, the demand for sessions was lower and fewer tutors were employed. More recently, the number of tutors has been higher in order to meet the demand for sessions. The number of tutors employed in any one semester has ranged from 13 to 40 and the average is 27. Of these 181 peer tutors, the largest number have been regular undergraduate students (77 students, or 43%). Fifty-nine of the tutors (33%) have been graduate students, while 45 (25%) have been short-term international exchange students. On average, each tutor has worked in the center for one year.

All tutors need to have a GPA of 3 or higher (the equivalent of a B average). In addition to this, they need to have received a B or better in all courses for each subject they intend to tutor. Furthermore, applicants who wish to tutor for the standardized language proficiency tests (TOEFL ITP, TOEFL iBT or IELTS) are required to have a documented score of 550 or higher for TOEFL ITP (with a score of at least 50 for each section of the test they would like to support), 80 or higher for TOEFL iBT (with a score of at least 20 for each section of the test that they would like to support) or 6.5 or higher for IELTS (with a score of at least 6.5 for each section of the test that they would like to tutor).

Students who apply to become tutors are usually highly motivated and hardworking. Students not only meet the requirements but are often active in other extracurricular activities. They are often core members of student clubs and associations. Students with higher English fluency or those who participate in Teacher's Licence Program tend to be interested in becoming tutors as well.

There are two training options for tutors. An intensive one-day training workshop is offered once per semester on a Saturday. In the workshop, practical tutoring skills are covered, as well as learning styles, communication skills such as active listening and different patterns of communication, tutoring ethics and the administrative aspects of the position, such as policies and paperwork. Alternatively, tutors can take a one-credit course on "Tutoring" which is offered within the BE Program. This course offers all the practical aspects covered in the one-day training, in addition to providing a theoretical background by introducing students to the concepts of learner autonomy, scaffolding and intercultural communication skills, as well as discussing plagiarism and appropriation. The students who take the tutoring course are required to read ten articles and write reflections.

After the training is completed, new tutors have to observe one tutorial session and write an observation report. They then offer a 'practice session' for one hour, while being observed by an incumbent tutor, who writes and submits an observation report in the same format. Following the observation and practice session, each new tutor meets the coordinator to discuss the sessions. If they are deemed ready, they are officially employed by the center at this stage. In some cases, new tutors are required to conduct further observations or practice sessions before they are employed. To maintain and observe the service offered at AAC, both tutors and tutees are required to fill in a feedback after every session. Tutees' feedback questions include multiple choice and open ended questions regarding the degree of their understanding, if they learned something new, and their level of confidence.

When students require academic support from the AAC, they make a formal request through the AAC online registration system. Students typically request weekly sessions with the same tutor for the remainder of the semester. However, one-off sessions are also possible. In the 2014 academic year, the AAC received 253 individual requests for tutoring from 197 students. In total, approximately 2,000 one-hour tutorial sessions were offered in that year. In the spring semester of the 2015 academic year, the AAC received 166 individual requests from 132 different students, with 1,050 one-hour tutorial sessions being offered. Since the total undergraduate student body of the university is less than 900, these figures show that a large proportion of more than 20% of undergraduate students enrolled at the university are receiving academic support from the AAC.

The Kinds of Students Who Request Support

As mentioned in previous sections, there are four groups of students at Akita International University: EAP, BE, GS/GB, and exchange students (EXC). Figure 1 shows the total numbers of requests for peer tutoring by each group from spring term 2013 to spring term 2015. As indicated in the graph, BE exceeds other groups with 247 requests for the 4 terms. Although there is not a remarkable difference in numbers of requests from the other groups, there are certain tendencies in the subjects they request.
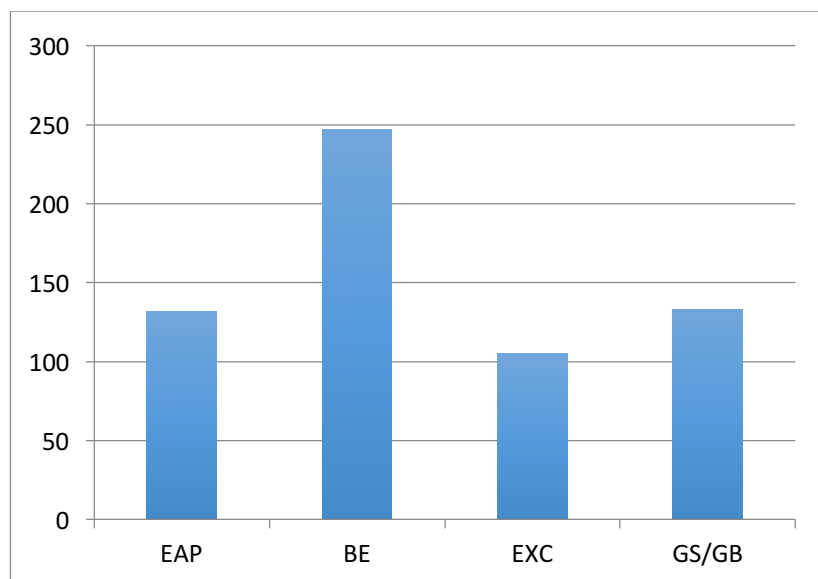
Figure 1. Numbers of Requests by Student Group

Figure 2 indicates a comparison of the frequently requested subjects by BE students. Approximately half of the requests are for standardized English proficiency tests including TOEFL ITP, iBT, and IELTS. The second most frequent subject is *Academic Writing*. Mandatory mathematics courses including *Algebra*, *Statistics*, and *Math for Liberal Arts* are also highly requested.
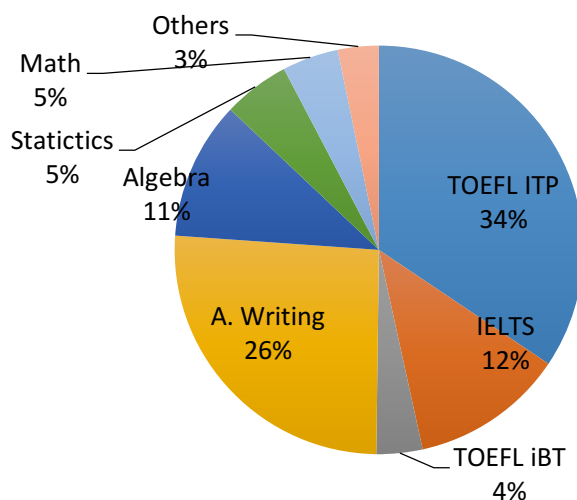

Figure 2. Frequently Requested Subjects by BE

These tendancies reflect the expectation of the curriculum on the BE students. They are required to increase their English ability and GPA to get accepted into the mandatory

study abroad programme. They are required to obtain more than 550 in TOEFL ITP, and a GPA of at least 2.5, which is an average grade of B-. Also, it is in BE when they take the most challenging writing classes. Together with all the English medium classes, this seems to increase the demand for Academic Writing support at AAC. Mandatory mathematics courses also start at this stage. It can become overwhelming for some students who have studied mathematics in Japanese to keep up with the course conducted in English. These curriculum factors affect the support they request from the AAC. The students studying in language programs including EAP and Japanese for exchange students do not share this tendency. However, the subjects requested by these two groups are also effected by curriculum factors. Figures 3 and 4 respectively provide comparisons of the subjects requested by EAP students and exchange students.
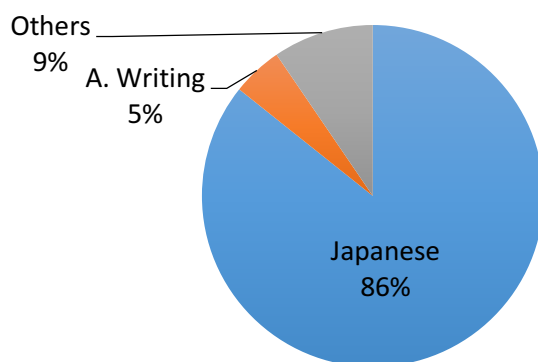

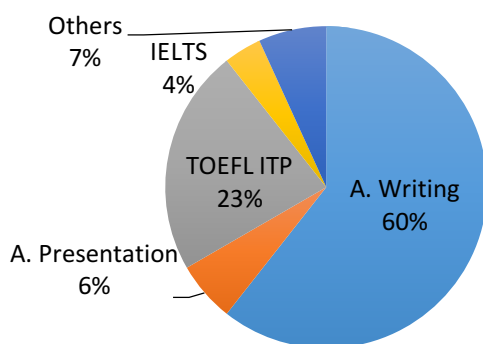Figure 3: Frequently Requested Subjects by Exchange Students

Figure 4. Frequently Requested Subjects by EAP students

As shown in graph 3, the most frequently requested subject by exchange students is Japanese. On the other hand, more than 90% of the EAP students request subjects related to academic English, including standardized academic English proficiency tests. The students studying in these programs attend language classes on a daily basis, and they are expected to meet certain standards depending on the level of the classes. Especially the students in EAP program are expected to perform language tasks at university level English.

The subjects students request reflect the expectations of the curriculum. Students of BE request support for standardized English proficiency tests because they are required to obtain a certain level of score to move onto the next step of the academic path. Similarly, EAP and exchange students demand support for language courses because they are studying in language programs.

Tutee Expectations and Motivations

Many types of students step into the AAC to request tutoring services, motivated to do so for different reasons. Regardless of what their expectations are, there seems to be a clear distinction in the tutees' motivating factors and their grade point averages.

Some tutees are simply high achievers. They have some of the highest grades in their classes, and they come to the AAC to seek higher grades. For example, such a tutee may have an A-, but would come to receive tutoring to increase their grade to an A. These tutees are usually studious, and will come to the sessions prepared with a clear goal for the session in mind. They actively participate in the sessions and may show an increase in ability in a short period of time.

Other tutees are of average grades, and will come mostly due to a lack of confidence in their reading or writing skills. These tutees are B or C students, who usually want confirmation from a tutor to see if they are on the right track to meeting their professor's expectations. Such tutees may show reluctance in the beginning to speak up or set their own goals, but will usually begin to participate more actively after a few sessions.

Finally, some tutees come to the AAC because their professors suggest for them to do so. These students are usually struggling to pass their classes and need extra help and support on fundamental skills, such as time management and basic study skills, without which they cannot understand the class content. Sometimes, these tutees come with the expectation that the tutors will correct their work for them, and will refuse to participate when they realize that they will need to do the work. Additionally, although no one forces them, these tutees

may feel that their professors made them come to the AAC, which can result in negative attitudes. Working with such tutees is often the most challenging for tutors.

Theoretical Background

The AAC is based on the framework of peer tutoring, which is defined by Topping (1998, p. 322) as "people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching." This style, in which two or more people achieve a similar goal by learning from and teaching one another, has also been termed *collaborative learning*. Gerlach (1994) states, "Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves." Sessions at the AAC involve two participants, one student tutor and one student tutee, working together to achieve higher grades or a deeper understanding of the material they are working on. The occurrence of collaborative learning can be concluded through past surveys conducted at the AAC, in which tutors have written, "I learned how to explain the differences in introduction and background information" or "I learned not only how to write or use language but also how to consider or rethink my essay." Topping, Duran and Van (2015) also explain the benefits of peer tutoring as helping the students improve not only academically, but also reducing the psychological stress of learning on the students (p. 24). Past tutees have given comments such as "It is comfortable to ask questions" and "Honestly, her way of teaching is better than that of my Algebra teacher." We can see that there are many benefits to peer tutoring, not only for the tutee, but also for the tutor, as learning occurs for both parties.

Additionally, the AAC promotes learner autonomy, which was first defined by Holec (1981) as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." Researchers have found various benefits of autonomous learning. Chan (2003) demonstrates in his study that letting students take control over their own learning allows them to feel more responsible for their learning. This pushes them to find learning styles and resources that best suit them. Thanasoulas (2000) also writes, "The autonomous learner takes a (pro-) active role in the learning process, generating ideas and availing himself of learning opportunities, rather than simply reacting to various stimuli of the teacher." By stepping into the AAC, the tutee is taking the first step towards autonomous learning, taking responsibility for what and how they learn instead of learning passively. This also includes finding weaknesses and patterns of common mistakes, so that they can apply it when they work by themselves. Tutees have concluded after sessions

that they could find their weak points, that they found their own mistake patterns, and that they felt more confident to continue working with the material that they came in with.

Tutors at the AAC also help them achieve such learning through various methods, including scaffolding, which Slavin (2009, as cited by Dzubak, 2009), defines as "the process of providing assistance to help students move to the point where they need support to the point where they are able to perform a skill independently." Instead of giving the correct answer, AAC tutors help tutees reach their academic goals through constant encouragement and supplying necessary hints along the way. Many tutees have commented on the constant encouragement that the tutors provide during the tutoring sessions, with survey answers such as "She was very good at encouraging me to consider more about the topic from new perspectives" and "She did not just point out the mistake, but also explain[ed] how the mistakes were wrong." This is significant for the tutee as it allows them to feel a sense of achievement and satisfaction, which leads to motivation and confidence in their work. Additionally, the usage of such methods and roles is also beneficial for the tutor, as they gain communication skills, leadership skills and critical thinking skills.

In recent years, there has been a recommendation from some for all teachers to foster a capacity for autonomy in their learners by teaching in flexible and learner-centered ways (e.g. Benson, 2013; Reinders, 2010; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). However, not all classroom teachers are ready to give up on their well-designed lesson plans and allow their learners to take control. Specifically in East Asia, education is claimed to use predominantly teacher-centred, lecture style teaching (Chen, 2013; Tan, 2014) and passive reception of knowledge by students (DeWaelsche, 2015; He, et al., 2011). The tutors' roles at the AAC are not the same as those of this traditional style teacher. As tutors provide instruction to individuals, it is easier for them to adjust the contents and learning pace to the tutee's needs. They can also try various methods to explain concepts until the student reaches comprehension.

In these ways, the AAC encourages collaborative learning between students in a one-on-one setting, conducting learning outside of the classroom and removed from teachers. It also strives for learner autonomy, as the final goal is for all participants to learn strategies which they can apply thereafter to take charge of their own learning.

What Happens in a Session?

The goal of tutoring is to empower tutees by helping them increase their confidence and capacity for learner autonomy. At the AAC, tutors use the tutoring cycle based on MacDonald (2000), which helps tutors to scaffold the learning in three different steps.

Beginning steps

The beginning steps are where tutors welcome the tutee and help them identify the task, break the task into smaller steps, and identifying the thought process for the task. This section also helps the tutor to build rapport with the tutee. At the very beginning of the session, the tutor greets the tutee and sets a climate so that the tutee would feel comfortable. Once settled, the tutor lets the tutee explain their concerns to identify the purpose and the goal of the tutoring session. The tutor asks open-ended questions to the tutee to clarify the depth of tutee's understanding of assignments and break the task into smaller steps. The purpose here is to provide the tutee with the opportunity to cognitively realize the thought process needed to complete the given assignment.

The tutors' job is not to give answers but to help tutees learn how to approach certain tasks. Tutors help tutees to identify the thought processes underlying the task. At this point, the tutor and tutee often review materials and information given by the instructor together. The tutor should not be the source of information but instead a guide as the tutee learns how to gather and utilize the textbook, rubric, and other resources.

Task steps

The task steps are the part of the session where the actual tutoring occurs. At the beginning of each task, the tutor asks the tutee to plan how much time they would like to spend on a particular task. The plan should be explicit and detailed, but flexible. While conducting the actual tutoring, the tutor encourages the tutee to take control of the session by asking questions and letting the tutee lead the conversation. While in the session, the tutor repeatedly asks the tutee to summarize the content and process used in the session. This helps the tutee to determine and evaluate their understanding. If the understanding is incomplete, the tutor asks questions to guide the tutee to self-correct.

Closing steps

Closing steps are taken to make sure that the tutee understood the process and is able to individually apply what they have learned from the session. After the tutee explains the content and process, the tutor offers positive reinforcement and confirms that the tutee really understands by asking questions. At the end of the session, both tutor and tutee decide and

plan what they should do in the next session. After the session, both tutor and tutee fill in the feedback form separately.

Overall

Tutees may not all be able to be autonomous at the beginning. The goal of the tutoring is to gradually minimize the instruction and help tutees to become independent learners. Tutors are there to help tutees understand their depth of knowledge, recognize their thought processes, and find their own method of learning. In order for tutees to gain such learner autonomy, tutors need to listen actively and keep the communication tutee-centered. Tutors confirm by asking open-ended questions. Tutors encourage tutees to work independently using what they learned during the tutoring session.

The Benefits of Tutoring for Tutors and Tutees

Through peer tutoring sessions, tutees benefit by developing learner autonomy, independent learning skills, and studying methods that are suitable for them. Tutees gradually become independent learners who are able to cognitively take control of their learning. Tutees also gain confidence through tutoring sessions, which enables them to be more comfortable in working by themselves. Out of 2000 comments left in the course of 3 semesters, 45 tutees commented on their increased confidence and motivation. Tutees left comments such as "thanks to his session, I could become confidently," and "I could have confidence in my essay thanks to this session with her.".

Through the tutoring sessions, the AAC provides tutors opportunities not just to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the subject but also improving their communication and leadership skills. Tutors are encouraged, challenged, and expected to have more knowledge and understanding of the course materials than their peers. Even during sessions, tutors constantly receive spontaneous feedback from their tutees in terms of how well they know the subject and how well they were able to explain it. Thus, by being a tutor, students are naturally forced to gain more knowledge and understanding of the materials and content of the subjects they tutor. As tutees gradually gain learner autonomy, tutors experience a sense of achievement. On the sessions where tutee left high evaluation and positive comments regarding confidence, tutors also commented that they could see the enhancement of the tutee's confidence. Tutors also develop leadership skills by learning to express and set clear goals for themselves. Tutors get opportunities to foster others' motivation and confidence through peer tutoring.

All the aspects of improvement that tutees gain from the tutor go back to tutors, making them more motivated and confident in their own tutoring. The tutoring experience provides the opportunity for students to gain skills applicable in other aspects of their lives and gives tutors wider opportunities to participate in various activities within and outside of school. Peer tutoring not only supports learners' academic achievement, but it also influences the attitudes of both the tutor and the tutee toward having more agency in their learning and becoming more active and autonomous learners.

Notes on the contributors

Rachael Ruegg is a lecturer in the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Previously, she was the coordinator of the Academic Achievement Center at Akita International University, where she had the opportunity to train and mentor wonderfully talented and motivated students such as her co-authors on this paper, many of whom have gone on to careers in education.

Taku Sudo is a guest researcher in the area of Japanese language education at Aarhus University, Denmark. He has taught Japanese to primary students to adult learners in Australia, Japan and Denmark. His academic interests include learner autonomy, and teaching writing in foreign languages.

Hinako Takeuchi is working on her Master's degree in Second Language Education at McGill University, Canada. Her tutoring experiences during her undergraduate years at the Academic Achievement Center, from which this paper derives, sparked her interest in education research. Her current interests lie in bilingual education, international school education, and learner autonomy.

Yuko Sato is an undergraduate student at Akita International University. She worked as a tutor in the Academic Achievement Center at her university for over two years. She is currently studying to receive a license to teach English language in Japanese schools. Yuko plans to undertake graduate studies in education.

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Professional Development for Language Learning Advisors

Saki Inoue, Kanazawa University, Japan

Abstract

Advising in language learning (ALL) is an effective way to support English language learners. More and more universities offer an advising service in Japan. In order to improve quality of an advising service, ongoing training of language learning advisors is necessary. In this paper, which is a summary of a study, a series of professional development programs for language learning advisors are introduced. Eight advisors participated in the research which involved completing reflection reports about the training and participating in semi-structured interviews. The implications of the research are discussed which are to develop a more effective professional development program for advisors.

Keywords: Advising; learning advisors; professional development; advisor training

Advising in Language Learning and Background of the Study

Advising in language learning (ALL) is considered to be one effective way to support students' English language learning. ALL is different from teaching or counseling. Carson and Mynard (2012) define ALL as "the process and practice of helping students to direct their own paths so as to become more effective and more autonomous language learners (p. 4)". Therefore, advisors do not tell students what they should do, but rather they support students to find their own way through dialogues. In order to achieve this goal, advisors need to have communication skills and suggest options which are suitable for students' interests and learning preferences.

The university where this study was conducted has an ALL program as part of its learning commons. The main goal of the ALL program is to assist students to be more autonomous learners. Advisors assist students to set a goal, choose materials, or plan their own learning. Seven English language teachers and three students were working as advisors. This is a paid job for student advisors. Student advisors were recruited based on a short essay and an interview. Student advisors need to have experience of using the facilities of language learning in the learning commons, high English proficiency, and communication skills. Teacher advisors were assigned by the university as part of their regular duties. The program offers 45 sessions per week. One of the advisors did not speak Japanese, so the advisor offered sessions in English, but the other sessions were conducted in Japanese. Neither teachers nor students had been trained as advisors before they started working. ALL is

relatively a new approach in Japanese institutions, so there are not many studies on training or professional development (PD) of advisors. Kato (2012) stated the importance of ongoing PD and introduced the example of reflective dialogue as an effective way to facilitate PD. Kato and Mynard (2016) outlined the role of an advisor in a book which can be used as a guide for new advisors. In their book, practical exercises that can be used in a training program are also demonstrated. The author of this paper has worked as a language learning advisor also a coordinator of the program and in charge of organizing the training sessions. This study was conducted to find out the needs of advisors to develop more effective PD. This is a summary of the study which includes contents of the PD for advisors and examines how advisors reacted to it. The participant advisors wrote several reflective reports and participated in a semi-structured interview. Based on the data, implications for advisors PD are indicated.

Professional Development

The number of visitors using the advising service has been increasing since the program established in 2006. With the increase in student users, the program has faced some challenges. Monthly training sessions were offered to cope with them. One of the challenges was that the definition of the word "autonomy" was different among advisors. Therefore, the level of commitment varied depending on the advisors. For example, one of the advisors assumed that lower level students need more intervention, so the advisor tended to decide plans and materials for the learners. Another advisor thought autonomy could be developed regardless of students' levels. Thus, students received different amounts of assistance. Another challenge was that advisors needed to know many things related to English language learning such as details of exams, materials, or strategies. The schedule and the contents of PD in 2016 are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Contents of PD for Advisors in 2016

Month	Contents	Purpose
April	Guidance, role playing,	• To introduce goals of the program and roles of advisors • To practice advising skills
May	Discussion and case study	• To reflect their sessions • To improve advising skills

June	Test-oriented training, Peer observation	• To gain knowledge about the IELTS exam • To give/receive direct feedback on the sessions
July	Reflection paper	• To reflect their sessions and seek points to improve the program
October	Case study, workshop by an experienced advisor	• To learn theories of learner differences and improve advising skills
November	Peer observation	• To give/receive direct feedback on their sessions
December	Reflection meeting	• To reflect and seek points to improve the program

Roleplay was used in the initial training for advisors. At first, experienced advisors demonstrated a session and asked other advisors to analyze their session. After that, all advisors worked in groups and did roleplays. In the roleplay, advisors played the role of the student, advisor, or observer. All groups shared how they approached the case and shared opinions.

Case 1: *A student who wants to get over 800 in TOEIC visited. The student's latest TOEIC score is about 350, but the student wants to achieve the goal within 3 months. The student belongs to a brass band and practices three times a week after school.*

In this case, two approaches emerged during the training. The first approach tried to have the student become aware of the reality and make a more manageable plan with the student. When the student asked, "can I achieve this goal within 3 months?" the advisors did not guarantee that, instead they spent time for planning and making short-term goals. The other group of advisors encouraged them by saying "You can do it". This phrase was often said by new advisors. This cheerleading approach can be problematic because student might become demotivated if they cannot achieve their goal, and advisors cannot be responsible for it. On the other hand, encouraging phrases may be able to motivate students. As a coordinator, I suggest new advisors to focus on achievable goals and encourage students to plan their own learning along with the goal. There is no right approach in advising, so the important thing for advisors is to be open to different perspectives. Through roleplay and discussion, advisors could be exposed to different ways to deal with various cases.

A test-oriented training session was offered in June. In the university, more and more students try to take the IELTS exam since universities in the United Kingdom and some other countries require students to submit an IELTS score. However, half of the advisors had not taken IELTS before and had difficulty when they were asked IELTS questions. The IELTS focused training was offered due to the situation and advisors' request. Kato and Mynard (2016) introduced different perspectives of an advisor being an 'expert' of exams. If advisors are not familiar with exams, students may be able to take a more active role in their learning. Advisors must consider how much they initiate student learning since the purpose of advising is to empower students' self-directed learning. PD opportunities should be an opportunity to remind advisors of their role.

In July, the last month of the spring semester, the advisors wrote a reflective report. The report asked five questions as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Questions in the Semester-end Reflective Report

Q1	Reflect on your sessions. Consider what was successful and what could have been done differently?
Q2	Do you feel that your advising skills improved over the semester and how so?
Q3	Do you have any requests or suggestions to improve the ECR?
Q4	How effective were the training sessions? What did you find useful or was there anything you didn't understand?
Q5	Any requests or suggestions for next training session?

In the reflections, most of the advisors claimed that the actual case studies were effective, and the IELTS-focused training was beneficial. In fact, they requested more training on testing-related matters such as introducing learning tools or strategies. This brings us the discussion of how much advisors need to know about the exams due to the matter of learner autonomy. Overall, advisors wanted to have more training sessions. In addition, the answers for Q1 were interesting because advisors' perspectives of what constituted a "successful session" differed. One of them wrote that a successful session was when the advisor could encourage students emotionally toward their goals. Another advisor said when students came back to have another session, the advisor regarded it as successful. One advisor mentioned that the session was successful when the advisor could ask appropriate questions

to understand students' individual difference and offer tailor-made options for them. This question should be considered more to tackle the challenge of the program.

At the beginning of the fall semester, the advisors attended a training workshop offered by an experienced learning advisor. The workshop focused on students' individual preferences and how to deal with the differences. Advisors tended to give advice based on their own experiences or preferences. If an advisor learned new vocabulary well by using flash card, the advisor often recommends students to use it. However, every student has different preferences and advisors cannot judge one method will work for everyone. Moreover, the advisors had a discussion regarding the mission of the program which is to encourage students to be more autonomous. The advisors shared how they regarded the goal and the term 'to be autonomous'. Through these discussions, the advisors developed a clearer idea of the role of being an advisor.

After the workshop, the advisors filled out a reflection form. The comments were positive and they gained knowledge about advising. Furthermore, some of them mentioned they became more confident after the training. One of the advisors stated, "I noticed that I already included many of those factors (introduced in the training) in my session. I confirmed that my session looks alright" (personal communication, October 22, 2016). Another advisor stated, "I have always been feeing worried about whether my advising style is right or wrong. I realized other advisors are also learning by trial and error, and I got more confidence as an advisor (personal communication, October 21, 2016). It was one of positive effects and was not expected.

Implications for Future PD

The study has several implications for establishing future PD in this ALL program; increasing the number of PD sessions, making training sessions more practical, and having more opportunities to discuss the goals and roles of advisors. The advisors mentioned several times in the interview or the reflection paper that they need training session more frequently. Now the program offers training opportunities once a month, but the advisors want to have more chances to discuss actual cases. The second point is offering more practical training sessions such as focusing on exams. As stated above, students can be more autonomous when an advisor is not familiar with the exam, so this matter needs to be considered among the advisors carefully. The third point is to encourage more communication among advisors. According to the reflection paper, each advisor had different opinions toward advising, and

that might be a cause of the difference in their quality of the sessions. As suggested by Kato (2012), having dialogue is an effective method to have better understanding on themselves and other advisors.

Conclusion

The need to improve English proficiency is increasing. ALL has great potential to support students who are struggling to discover their way to achieve their language related goals. However, the number of advisors is still limited, and there is not enough research on the subject. In this summary of the research, advisors agreed with the positive effect of PD programs, yet the contents have to be more developed. A common scenario is one in which a student is nervous and anxious at first, yet becomes more confident through having dialogues with an advisor. That is a crucial point of ALL. In order to support students, development of advisors' skills is necessary. Therefore, further study about advisors' PD is essential.

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Effects of Drawing and Sharing a 'Picture of Life' in the First Session of a Mentoring Program for Experienced Learning Advisors

Satoko Kato, Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

Since language learning relates to learners' life events, Learning Advisors (advisors) who are professionals in promoting learner autonomy through conducting reflective dialogue with learners, often tap into learners' life stories in advising sessions. The previous studies on the life narrative approach indicate that storytellers construct personal meaning and stronger self-image while telling their stories (Bruner, 1990; Erikson, 1968). Atkinson (1998) indicates that creating visual images ahead of time could help storytellers prepare to tell their life stories.

This study investigates the effects of drawing a 'picture of life' (PL) and sharing it in the first session of a professional development (PD) program where one-to-one mentoring sessions were conducted between five experienced advisors and the author during a period of six months. Data were collected from written journals and post-mentoring questionnaires. A qualitative analysis was conducted to investigate the effects of conducting the PL activity in the first session. The results showed that the PL activity not only helped the storytellers bring new insights and meanings to their professional and personal lives, but also it served as a 'point to return to' which became a strong thread throughout the following sessions.

Keywords: picture of life, narrative approach, professional development, advising in language learning, mentoring

Background

Advising in language learning (ALL) is a growing field in language education which focuses on supporting language learners become more autonomous in their learning (Benson, 2011; Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans, 2001; Mynard & Carson, 2012). This study sheds light on Learning Advisors (advisors) who are professional language educators dedicated to promoting learner autonomy by interacting with language learners through a unique use of dialogue. In general, 1) advisors work in tandem with self-access centers (SACs) which consist of educational elements such as resources, people, and systems to promote learner autonomy among language learners (Benson, 2011; Benson & Voller, 1997; Gardner & Miller, 1999), 2) advisors' central goal is to help language learners become effective, aware,

and reflective learners by developing learners' ability to identify their language needs and manage their affective issues (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans, 2001; Mynard & Carson, 2012; Reinders, 2012; Yamashita, 2015), and 3) advisors need to develop professional knowledge and strategies in ALL by undergoing well-established professional development (PD) programs (Kato, 2012; Kato & Mynard, 2016; Kodate & Foale, 2012; Morrison & Nararro, 2012).

Mentoring for mutual learning

In this study, a mentoring program was introduced as an experienced advisors' PD program where a mentor (the author) conducted one-to-one sessions with the mentees (advisors). Mentoring was defined initially using a definition by Kram (1985) as a relationship between more-experienced mentors and less-experienced mentees, where mentors provide mentees with career support and psychosocial support (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007). This type of traditional mentoring approach is based on transmitting knowledge and skills from experts to novices and thus, the process is often directive and hierarchical, expecting to see improvement in mentees' performance (Ragins & Kram, 2007). On the other hand, the modern approach in mentoring perceives mentoring as a personal and professional relationship which focuses on transformation by broadening a mentee's world-view (Brockbank & McGill, 2006). This type of modern mentoring relationships induces 'mutual learning' where the dialogue between a mentor and a mentee will be co-constructed (Delaney, 2012).

Mentoring has also been introduced in teacher education to enhance the professional growth not only for novice teachers but for experienced teachers (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). Previous research has shown that mentoring relationships reduce attrition among new teachers, improve confidence in teaching, and develop self-reflection skills (Delaney, 2012; Hobson et al., 2009; Kissau & King, 2014). Mentoring relationships become beneficial when the imbalance in power, such as significant differences in age or experience between the mentor and the mentee, is prevented (Brown, 2001; Delaney, 2012; Kissau & King, 2014). Furthermore, equality in relationships establishes trust and rapport which leads to mutual learning that also helps experienced professionals grow (Brown, 2001; Delaney, 2012).

Life story/life narratives

The effectiveness of mentoring largely relies on having a trust relationship which also applies to the advising relationship between an advisor and a language learner. To establish trust in the first session, advisors often tap into learners' life stories as language learning is connected with learners' life events. This process of exploring 'who the learner is' creates the foundation of a trust relationship and reveals the values that the learner has (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Karlsson (2012) investigated autobiographical narratives in advising and claims that storytelling in advising provokes self-reflexivity and helps learners become more autonomous language learners. The life narrative approach has also become more widely accepted in establishing PD programs for teacher education in the past decades (Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Atkinson (1998) argues that the potential benefits of sharing a life story are gaining clearer perspectives on personal experiences and feelings, creating a stronger self-image, cherishing experiences and insights, gaining joy and inner peace, releasing burdens, creating community, changing something in our lives, understanding oneself better in a way one had not tried before, and giving a 'good' ending to the story (p. 25). When a life story is being told, it tends to create a new shared meaning between a storyteller and a listener as they together are collaborators composing and constructing a story (Atkinson, 2002; Bruner 1990; Yamada, 2000). In this regard, advisors have advantages to be a good life story interviewer as their job is to listen to learners attentively. In fact, advising strategies such as repeating, restating, summarizing, empathizing, asking metaphor questions, and giving positive feedback were repeatedly used in the sessions in this study.

Using a visual aid: Picture of life

Using visual aids is relatively common in ALL, life narratives, and clinical psychology. Techniques such as using photographs, drawing a time line or images, and making a collage are used in ALL and life story interviews in order to support storytellers in identifying the key events and feelings which those events carry. The Draw-a-Man test (Goodenough, 1926), the House Tree Person test (Buck, 1948), and the Baum test (Koch, 1952) are notable drawing approaches used in clinical psychology. In each case, a drawing is used as an effective approach to promote the dialogue between a storyteller and a listener to explore the storyteller's unconscious mental state. Yamada (2002; 2012) who specializes in investigating on models of life-span in developmental psychology, focused on life story

drawings to examine how people from different cultural backgrounds represent their lives visually by drawing their 'image map of life'. Yamada (2012) suggests eight categories in visual life stories, such as the climbing story (showing ups and downs in life as climbing a mountain), the expansion story (focusing on growth and development), the road story (describing life courses which leads to their goals), the events story (sorting out by life events), the choices story (elaborating on choices and turning points in life), the flow story (describing life as a flow of a river or a stream which is beyond one's control), the cycle story (describing life as a never-ending cycle), and the being story (focusing on here and now).

Based on the concepts of using drawing as an effective tool for life story telling, the participants of this study were asked to draw a 'picture of life' (PL) which represents their past, present, and future. The eight categories of life story pictures in Yamada (2012) were shown to the participants in this study as an example before they were asked to draw their PLs. The participants mentioned later that having seen the examples helped them draw their pictures as they could get some ideas on what to draw in advance.

The study

The purpose of conducting the study is to establish a well-structured PD program for experienced advisors. As the previous studies imply, mentoring relationships could contribute to experienced teachers' professional development as mentoring relationships help teachers gain confidence, develop self-reflection, and promote mutual learning (Brown, 2001; Delaney, 2012; Kissau & King, 2014; Hobson et al., 2009). Since advising is based on one-to-one dialogue between an advisor and a learner, the author believes that one of the most valuable approaches in establishing experienced advisors' PD program is to introduce mentoring where a mentor and a mentee conduct one-to-one dialogue (Kato, 2012; Kato & Mynard, 2016).

In this study, the five participants were invited to attend a one-to-one mentoring program during a period of six months as a 'mentee' where the author took the role of a 'mentor'. The study focuses on investigating the effects of drawing a PL and sharing it in the first mentoring session. The program consisted of four sessions for each mentee (Table 1). Each session lasted for 1.5 hours on average and was conducted in the mentees' native language (English or Japanese). The participants were asked to complete the following four tasks; 1) draw a PL prior to the first session, 2) write a reflective journal after each session, 3)

participate in a collaborative feedback session where the mentor and the mentee share their journals, and 4) complete a post-program questionnaire.

Table 1. Structure of the Mentoring Program

1st session	2nd session	3rd session	4th session
Mentee shares life story by using the 'picture of life'.	Mentee sets the agenda for the session and mentor listens attentively. The session is conducted in mentee's native language. One session lasts for 1.5 hours on average.		Mentor and mentee share their journals to have a collaborative feedback session.
Task after the session			
Both mentor and mentee keep journals after the sessions by using the provided format.			Mentee completes a post-program questionnaire.

Participants

The five advisors who attended this program as 'mentees' were all females with experience of working as full-time professional advisors for two to six years. When the participants started their career as advisors at SACs belonging to a university in Japan, they all participated in an initial orientation and training program. Some advisors are currently taking on the role of an advisor educator or serving as a senior colleague (a mentor) to new advisors.

The author, who participated in this program as a mentor, has been working as an advisor/advisor educator for more than 10 years at a university and a two-year college in Japan. The mentor is a Japanese-English bilingual advisor who has conducted over 3,500 advising sessions. She was either an advisor educator to the mentees participating in the study or worked with them as their colleague in the past. She currently works at a different institution and does not have a role in any kind of personal or professional assessment or evaluation. To ensure the equality in relationships and to include the researcher as a participant, the mentor completed the same tasks that were assigned to mentees (drawing a PL, sharing a life story, and writing journals).

Data collection, data analysis, and coding

Prior to the data collection, the participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and were asked to sign a consent form including the research ethics. Qualitative data, reflective journals, open-ended questionnaires) were collected together with quantitative data (five-point Likert scale items on a questionnaire) from both the mentor and the mentees. A three-step coding process, (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding) was applied. First, the author examined the data and created tentative labels which represent what emerged from the data. Second, the relationships among the open codes were identified (axial coding), and then, core categories were chosen to relate other codes into a simple storyline. Initially, 27 tentative labels were identified which were summarized into 23 labels. Then, they were categorized into four main categories (Table 2).

Table 2. Coding Categories

	Category	Definition		Sub category	Frequency
1	Awareness	Awareness raising observed related to the PL activity.	1.1	Awareness triggered by drawing a PL	14
			1.2	Clarity	13
			1.3	New aspect of storyteller	9
			1.4	Future	10
			1.5	Thinking on the spot	8
			1.6	Connecting past and present	8
			1.7	Unexpected	10
			1.8	Connecting insights	6
2	Emotions	Affective or emotional state expressed or observed.	3.1	Hesitation	16
			3.2	Tears	11
			3.3	Enjoyment, satisfaction	9
			3.4	Confidence	6
			3.5	Regrets	4
			3.5	Fear	1
3	Relationship building	Serving as reasons for building relationship between the mentor and mentee.	2.1	Approval, acceptance	15
			2.2	Mentor's story	11
			2.3	Point to return to	6
			2.4	Co-creation, mutual learning	7
			2.5	Value sharing	6
			2.6	Trust	5
4	Career support	Transferring knowledge and skills by referring to approaches and procedures related to the PL activity.	4.1	Applying PL activity	13
			4.2	Advising strategies	11
			4.3	Proposed changes	6

Results

Data were collected from written journals and post-mentoring questionnaires which were produced in English or Japanese. In the following results, the data provided in Japanese were translated into English by the author.

Task 1: Drawing a PL prior to the first session

Figure 1 shows the PLs produced by the participants. Picture 1 is a cartoon style drawing where each box indicates a place and life events. Picture 2 uses a hand to represent a life where each finger points out important values. Picture 3 shows a mountain which has a long flight of stairs filled with life events shown as stars and cracks. Picture 4 includes a graph and symbols of life events. Picture 5 is a flower where each petal shows past careers. The center of the flower gathers the skills and knowledge acquired through past jobs. Picture 6 was produced by the mentor which shows a never-ending life cycle including past events and future visions. The above life images could be categorized as a climbing story, a road story, an events story, and a cycle story according to Yamada (2012). Although the drawings were creative and detailed, they were not yet a life story but just symbols and images before the stories were told. The mentees added more drawings while telling their stories or seemed to realize something on the spot when using the PLs in the first session. The PLs were used again in the following sessions and the PLs helped the mentees connect themselves right back to the first session without much effort. In other words, the PLs were used as a tool to take the mentees to their high points of the first session without any scaffolding process.
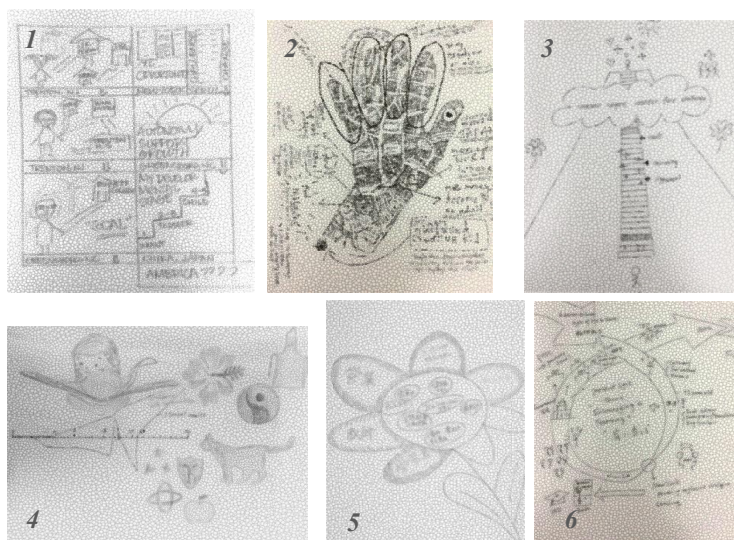

Figure 1. Pictures of Life
*Images are deliberately presented in low resolution to protect participant's privacy and to maintain confidentiality.

Task 2: Writing reflective journals

The data from the journals indicated that drawing a PL was challenging and some mentees showed vulnerability and hesitation when showing their PLs to the mentor.

Examples:

"It was challenging to do because initially, I worried about my drawing skill."

"I felt like a kid when showing my picture to my mentee."

"I hesitated once because I didn't know how much I should share as I was not sure it was what the mentor wants."

However, all mentees agreed that the PL activity helped them reflect on their lives in an eye-opening way and eventually, it developed trust, openness, and goodwill between the two.

Example:

"By showing the picture in the first session made it easier for me to talk to my mentor honestly in the following sessions as she already knows who I am."

Task 3: Collaborative feedback by sharing the journals

McCracken (1988) mentions that ensuring internal consistency offers a primary quality check and emphasizes that reliability and validity are not the best standards for life story narratives as the process itself is highly subjective. Therefore, in order to ensure the internal consistency, a collaborative feedback session by the mentor and the mentee sharing each other's journals was conducted at the end of the program. It was also a process for both participants to explore what they could not observe on their own. The results indicate the PL activity was a risk taking self-disclosure but its advantages outweigh the disadvantages. It not only clarified the mentees' past experiences but also their beliefs and identities.

Task 4: Post-program questionnaire

Table 3 shows the results of the post-program questionnaire completed by the five participants (P1 to. P5). The questionnaire consists of 12 items in five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree), followed by two open-ended questions. The data indicate that the PLs helped the mentees tell their life stories (4.80), sharing each other's PLs developed trust relationships (4.80), and drawing and using the PLs in the first session had a positive effect on the following sessions (5.00). However, it also became clear that there were

individual differences related to the 'hesitation' towards drawing and sharing the PLs which derived from a lack of confidence in their drawing skills or feelings of vulnerability in self-disclosure. However, it turned out that the PL served as a powerful awareness raising activity which had positive effects on the following sessions.

Table 3 Post-program Questionnaire

		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	Average
1.	When I was asked to draw a 'picture of my life' and bring it to the first session, I felt uncomfortable and hesitant at first.	5.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.80
2.	Drawing the picture of my life helped me become more aware of many things which I wasn't aware of before.	5.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
3.	I enjoyed drawing the picture of my life.	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.40
4.	I felt uncomfortable and hesitant to share the 'picture of my life' with my mentor.	4.00	4.00	1.00	4.00	1.00	2.80
5.	While I was telling my life through the picture, I became aware of things that I wasn't aware of before.	5.00	2.00	3.00	5.00	4.00	3.80
6.	Having the picture of my life as a visual tool supported me talk about my life story.	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.80
7.	Having the picture of my life activity in the first session limited the topics to talk about.	1.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	1.00	1.60
8.	I wish I could start the mentoring program without having the 'picture of my life' activity.	1.00	3.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.40
9.	Telling my life story by having the picture of my life helped me connect with my mentor.	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.80
10.	Having my mentor share her picture of her life with me helped me connect with my mentor.	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.80
11.	We occasionally came back and talked about the picture of my life in the following sessions as well.	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.60
12.	Telling my life story by having the picture of my life as a visual aid had a good influence on the following sessions.	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Open end Q1: What are the possible advantages and disadvantages in drawing the 'picture of my life' and sharing it with the mentor in the first session?

Open end Q2: Please share your thoughts and ideas on starting the mentoring program by drawing the 'Picture of my life' and sharing it to your mentor.

Results from coding

The data collected from the journals and questionnaire were coded and the following four main categories were chosen as shown in Table 2.

1) **Awareness raising**

In terms of frequency, the most significant main category was 'awareness' which was observed throughout the program. Within the category, the highest sub-category was 'awareness triggered by drawing a PL', which occurred while drawing, after drawing, and while talking about the PLs. The second highest sub-category in 'awareness' was 'clarity'. While telling their stories by using the PLs, many mentees realized something on the spot which they had not noticed when they drew the picture.

Examples:

"Drawing a picture allowed me to broaden my thoughts rather than writing it out. While I was drawing, I could connect my past, present, and my future more easily."

"It was interesting that just by drawing pictures, it helped me to talk about my life. if I didn't do this, I felt a little bit of everywhere. I discovered me through this process."

"There is something about the process holding pencil. Drawing pictures, I was thinking as I drew what do I want to represent here. Because I did it and it was easy for me to talk."

2) Emotions

The first session turned out to be emotional in most cases as the mentees faced their past and current struggles. Therefore, emotions such as hesitation, tears, enjoyment, confidence, regrets, and fear were observed. The highest sub-category in 'emotions' was 'hesitation' followed by 'tears' and 'enjoyment, satisfaction'.

Examples:

"I felt a little vulnerable, as I was sharing not only a story but something I had made."

"I talked about my past experiences. This is where I cried. I can't describe it accurately, but I could feel that my mentor was empathizing with how I felt."

"It was a fun, interesting, and stimulating ice-breaking approach that seemed to engender trust, openness, and good will from the very start."

3) Relationship building

Within the sub-categories, 'approval and acceptance' was the highest and it had a strong connection with building relationships between the mentor and the mentees.

Examples:

> *"I truly felt I was not judged. I felt accepted. I am me and this is my story. It's been respected by the mentee."*

> *"I felt powerful at the end of the session and valued because throughout my sharing experience, my mentor had been listening closely to me and absorbing what I said and connecting it."*

It also turned out that having the mentor sharing her PL and life story established equality in relationships and helped the mentees feel safe to disclose about themselves. Example:

> *"My mentor honestly revealed her life story. That made me feel I could also tell my honest feelings and emotions. My mentor sounded no longer a researcher but a person who share similar experiences crossing borders."*

Conducting the PL activity in the first session is highly challenging, however, it gave a significant opportunity for the mentees to experience 'approval and acceptance' from the mentor which lead to building a strong trust relationship between the two.

4) Career support

The mentees showed high-metacognition in realizing what was going on in the sessions. In other words, the mentees attend the sessions as mentees but at the same time, they were observing the sessions objectively as professional advisors. Therefore, comments such as 'That is a great metaphor question to ask at this point" or "You had me experience the process of acceptance and it was powerful" were made during the sessions. To this extent, the mentoring sessions were taken as an opportunity for knowledge and skill transfer which is considered as one of the features of career support in mentoring.

The effects of drawing and sharing PLs

Drawing a PL and sharing it in the first session was a process of helping mentees establish a clearer self-image, connect insights, bridge the past, present, and future, and create new perspectives about their professional and personal lives. In general, the process was full of emotions such as hesitation, enjoyment, satisfaction, fear, and tears. Sharing life stories also created a foundation for a trust relationship between the mentor and the mentee. In this

regard, the results of this study coincided the claims which Atkinson (1998) made about the benefits of sharing a life story.

The uniqueness of this study was to focus on drawing a picture of life prior to the first session and using the picture when sharing a life story. The coding analysis showed that within the highest main category 'awareness', the highest sub-category was 'awareness triggered by drawing a PL'. A variety of awareness seemed to occur while drawing, after drawing, and when sharing their PLs. Furthermore, although disclosing one's life story in the first session was a challenging task and showing their drawings to the mentor was even more challenging, all five mentees agreed that the life picture activity had a positive influence on the following sessions (Table 2).

Discussion

Keeping options open

The PL activity seemed to provide an opportunity for the mentees to prepare their life stories ahead of time by leaving their options open. Rather than describing in a written format which requires more logical thinking, drawing symbols and images to show values and meanings of their lives provided more freedom for translating what the symbols mean when other people see it. In this sense, the picture itself is not a life story yet. It becomes a life story when the story of the picture was being told. Life story interviewing is a process where a storyteller and a listener co-construct a story (Bruner, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, Yamada, 2000). In this regard, the PLs provided the storytellers with the freedom to decide on the extent to which they wanted to co-construct the story with the listener by observing the levels of comfort and trust they have with the listener. Therefore, it is assumed that drawing a PL was effective in terms of preparing a rough storyline while leaving some open space for the mentees.

Serving as a 'point-to-return to'

Usually, it takes a while to reflect on the previous sessions in a dialogue. However, the PLs helped the mentees jump back to the moment in a few seconds. In fact, when the PLs were shown to the mentees again in the following sessions, it was obvious that the mentees' minds instantly went back to the first session without much effort. In particular, the PLs played a significant role in the final sessions as a 'point to return to'. The PL activity was not only effective in prompting reflection on the past sessions, but also in considering a new

future. Most of the mentees had a better sense of how to continue their life journey and how to complete the pictures. In every case, a powerful moment was created whenever the PLs were used in the sessions.

Building a mutually trusting relationship

The previous studies imply that the role of trust is critical for having a successful mentoring relationship, and listening to a life story is a process of collaboration where a storyteller and a listener co-construct a dialogue (Atkinson, 1998; Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Brown, 2001; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Delaney, 2012; Kram, 1985). In this study, it was also the quality of relationship which influenced the outcome of the mentoring process. Without establishing a mutually trusting relationship, it would have been extremely difficult for both parties to collaborate successfully. It is considered that the strong trust relationships observed in this study were built upon the following three factors. First, the mentor disclosed herself by completing the same tasks which the mentees had to complete (sharing her PL and journals). It is likely that the mentor's willingness in taking the same risks created a sense of trust in relationships. Second, the process of 'approval and acceptance' which was the highest subcategory in 'relationship building' (Table 2) seemed to have a positive influence on building trust. As a matter of fact, it was often the 'approval and acceptance' process which later revealed to be mentees' turning point in building trust relationships. Third, the mentor was an experienced advisor who specializes in conducting dialogue through building trustful relationships and mentees were professionals in promoting their self-reflection. Therefore, the collaboration between the mentor and mentees could occur in a natural flow. The above three hypothesis in trust building leads the author to future research questions which are: 1) what are the 'turning points' in building trust between a mentor and a mentee? and 2) how can a mentor effectively induce turning points in sessions?

Future research and proposed changes

Despite the positive effects the PL activity carries, we need to be aware of the risks of self-disclosure. Some people could be intimidated, embarrassed, and feel uncomfortable about telling their life stories to others. Seen in this light, it would have been easier and comfortable for the mentees in this study to draw and share their PLs if the mentor had drawn and shared her PL before asking mentees to do the task. Also, as the number of participants of this study was limited to five and as they were all female advisors, the findings of this study could only

be applied to the data collected in this study and cannot be generalized or directly applied to other contexts.

Conclusions

This study investigated the effects of drawing and sharing a picture of life in the first session of a six-month mentoring program for experienced advisors. Positive effects were observed from the data collected from the journals and questionnaire which indicated that the PL activity helped the participants to develop a clearer *s*elf-image, deeper insights while connecting their identities and values with their past experiences related to their professional and personal lives. Sharing a PL usually triggered emotions; however, challenging self-disclosures resulted in establishing stronger relationships between the mentor and the mentees. Moreover, referring to the PLs in subsequent sessions was effective in terms of facilitating the recalling of memories and immediately promoting reflection on the first session.

Language learning is strongly connected with learners' life events, and all learners have stories to tell. The same applies to experienced educators when it comes to their PD. Although this study focuses on the field of ALL, it might have a potential to be applied to teacher mentoring programs which provide not only pedagogical techniques to mentees but also psychological support based on a trust relationship.

Notes on the contributor

Satoko Kato is a Chief Learning Advisor at Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages and a lecturer at the graduate school at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. She is developing and implementing advisor education programs for novice and experienced advisors. She co-authored *Reflective Dialogue: Advising in language learning* with Jo Mynard (published by Routledge, NY in 2016).

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