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## The Learner Development Journal Issue 6: Learner Development Beyond The Classroom

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**Authors:** Isra Wongsarnpigoon, Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa, Phillip A. Bennett, & André Parsons

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**Author contact:** <israww(at)gmail(dot)com>, <razafindratsimba-d(at)kanda(dot)kuis(dot)ac(dot)jp>, <bennett-p(at)kanda(dot)kuis(dot)ac(dot)jp>, & <parsons.andre(at)h(dot)hokkyodai(dot)ac(dot)jp>

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This article is part of a collection of practitioner research on the theme of “Learner Development Beyond the Classroom” for Issue 6 of the *Learner Development Journal* (LDJ6), edited by Isra Wongsarnpigoon, Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa, Phillip A. Bennett, and André Parsons. Published once a year, each issue of the *Learner Development Journal* follows a Community of Practices approach over a period of approximately 18 months in which contributors work together, under the guidance of the editors, to share, respond to, and develop their research and writing.

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# Introduction to *Learner Development Journal* 6: How We View Learner Development Beyond the Classroom

**Isra Wongsarnpigoon**, Kanda University of International Studies,  
Japan <isravw(at)gmail(dot)com>

**Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa**, Kanda University of International  
Studies, Japan <razafindratsimba-d(at)kanda(dot)kuis(dot)ac(dot)jp>

**Phillip A. Bennett**, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan  
<bennett-p(at)kanda(dot)kuis(dot)ac(dot)jp>

**André Parsons**, Hokkaido University of Education, Hakodate  
Campus, Japan <parsons.andre(at)h(dot)hokkyodai(dot)ac(dot)jp>

The editorial team for the *Learner Development Journal* Issue 6 (LDJ) have all known each other well for some time, and when we came together for this issue, we were aware that we shared a devotion to supporting the development of our learners in their learning beyond the classroom (LBC). Isra, Phillip, and Vola work together as learning advisors in the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at our university, where we aim to foster our learners' autonomous learning, which usually involves making the most of the entire worlds they live in. We had also had conversations with André about self-access, advising, and autonomy at various conferences over the past several years, and we had all completed the learner advising courses offered by the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education. Although we have different experiences and working contexts, our shared interests and background fueled our excitement to collaborate on this theme. Our unique experiences with LBC led to productive discussions in which we were able to co-develop the theme and this issue.

We knew that we were all familiar with the topic of learner autonomy and devoted to fostering it in learners. Still, we realized that despite the growing attention to learner autonomy in the field, much of the literature and presentations we saw locally tended to focus on how teachers could promote it within their classrooms. In our work as teachers and advisors, and additionally from our own life experiences, we knew how much of an individual's development as autonomous, agentive, fulfilled learners was engendered through actions taken outside of class, or outside of formal institutions. On the other hand, as Benson (2011) puts it, "As classroom teachers, we become accustomed to the idea that classrooms are the 'natural' place for learning to take place. Out-of-class learning processes are also often 'invisible' to classroom teachers" (p. 8); this passage resonated deeply with us. We felt that many educators were missing out on opportunities to appreciate their learners' development outside of the limited periods during which they were in direct contact. It was therefore our hope that the theme of Learner Development

Beyond the Classroom would allow contributors to undertake such explorations and readers to reflect on their own learners and contexts.

In formulating our theme, Phil Benson and Hayo Reinders's work (e.g., Benson & Reinders, 2011; Reinders & Benson, 2017) helped us to frame the focus of the contributions we hoped to encourage in this issue. They provide a framework (Benson, 2011) for LBC containing four dimensions: *location* (i.e., where and when learning takes place), *formality* (i.e., the connection between the learning activities and formal organized courses or qualifications), *pedagogy* (i.e., the amount of instruction involved), and *locus of control* (i.e., who makes decisions regarding learning). This framework was key in our clarification of the theme. Particularly, we appreciated the idea that location was not the only factor in determining LBC (it is, after all, learning *beyond* the classroom and not *outside* the classroom). We also realized that LBC did not have to be totally informal and unguided; Benson's (2011) clarification that such learning does not preclude the presence of instruction resonated with us. Furthermore, Reinders and Benson (2017) emphasize that "LBC does not exclude the classroom but rather CONNECTS WITH it [emphasis in the original]" (p. 563). Indeed, they have identified a need for explorations of how teaching and the classroom environment can link to LBC (Benson, 2011; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

For *LDJ 6*, we have hoped that by providing a venue for authors to explore how LBC connects to their own contexts, whether as teachers, other practitioners, learners, or researchers, they might discover new insights into how it also connects with learner development. These discoveries might in turn lead to future innovations in their (or readers') support of learners. We also felt this dovetailed nicely with the *Learner Development Journal's* mission of connecting research and practice.

## Our Connections to LBC

Having introduced our conception of the issue's theme as a group, in keeping with our enthusiasm for narrative exploration and *LDJ's* encouragement of expressing personal voices, we will share each editor's personal connections to LBC.

### *Isra*

While planning and discussing this issue over the last two years, I have realized the degree to which, like my colleagues, LBC has been a consistent thread throughout my personal and professional life. Although I was always fairly successful in language classrooms, when I got to university, I found it hard to connect my (elective) Japanese classes with my other studies and my life; eventually, I stopped studying Japanese in order to focus on my major. A few years after graduating, I started learning Japanese again informally by focusing on my personal interests, using music, videos, and the internet; this reignited my enjoyment of the language. After moving to Japan, knowing I had this capacity in me helped me to continue my own self-directed learning of the language.

While teaching in Japanese public schools, I found that the classroom environment was insufficient in providing access to authentic communicative language or opportunities for students to establish personal connections with English. My students who thrived in their English learning were usually those who sought exposure to language beyond the confines of the classroom, in their own worlds. When I became a language learning advisor, I was working with learners in the inherently "beyond-the-classroom" environment of the SALC, and I realized how fulfilling it was to help learners discover ways to learn successfully and take ownership of language in their own lives. Even though they had chosen to study

languages at a university specializing in international studies, I found that many of these students nevertheless faced obstacles imposed by the requirements of formal study or mandatory standardized exams; still others held ingrained beliefs that their teachers knew best and, even when they were not very engaged in the content of their classroom learning, could find no other alternatives. Through both reflection and learning from the literature, it became clear that flourishing as a language learner and user hinged on more than just possessing innate language ability or motivation. Both as a teacher and as an advisor, I found that the learners who achieved the most fulfillment, and often success, in their learning tended to be those who actively learned beyond the classroom, explored their language environments, and took advantage of the affordances available in them. Given my experiences as a learner and educator, I hoped that by encouraging exploration of LBC in this issue, I could help both contributors and readers to reach some of the same realizations.

### ***Vola***

My interest in LBC mainly stems from my own language learning experience. I have learned three languages in addition to the two official languages I grew up with in Madagascar. Of the three languages, I love English the most. I loved it so much that I decided to become a teacher of English when I was about 19 years old, even though the profession of teaching itself was not appealing to me. My goal was to use English as much as possible, and teaching it was the best way I could imagine to do that, as I lived in a country where English was barely used. In order to become a teacher, I knew I needed to work a lot on my English. I was aware that what I learned from secondary school was not enough to pass the competitive exam to enter the Teacher Training College at the University of Antananarivo, as only 20 first-year students were accepted for each department every year. Therefore, I took courses at two different English language centers for about 2 years in total. The courses were helpful in terms of the development of my language skills. However, I felt that the courses were not sufficient for me to attain some of my specific goals, such as being able to understand the BBC News on TV and on the radio (the only English listening resources I had outside of class at that time), to read English magazines and newspapers without constantly consulting a dictionary, and to interact with foreigners. Thus, I decided to take charge of my own LBC.

My English LBC was key to my success in entering the Department of English of the Teacher Training College, which was the gateway to a career and an adventurous life that I had never thought I would have. To ensure that I would succeed, I set a detailed weekly schedule that I had to follow at all costs. This schedule included activities and resources to use at the language center library and at home, the times allocated to each activity, and the target language skills involved in each activity. Without the dedication I put into LBC, I would not have become a teacher of English in the first place and would not have received scholarships enabling me to further my education abroad. That is why I strongly believe in the importance of LBC and of taking charge of one's own learning, which is referred to as "learner autonomy" (Benson, 2011). In my learning experience, it was only beyond the classroom that I felt autonomous, as I was in total control of my learning. Therefore, for me, LBC and learner autonomy are very much interrelated.

After receiving my master's degree in the US, I returned to Madagascar and taught English in the center where I used to study. After teaching for 5 years, I decided to learn more about the promotion of learner autonomy, because I realized that many of my

students were not autonomous enough in their English learning. In other words, they would attend classes and do the assignments I gave them, but they would not necessarily do any extra activities to improve their English. That was how the idea of doing a PhD focused on learner autonomy came to me. Since then, I have been researching learner autonomy and promoting it to my students through teaching and advising.

For me, then, the topic of LBC is deeply close to my heart due to my personal experience. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity not only to be part of the editorial team of this issue focusing on LBC, but also to co-author one of the articles with two of my former students, who have the same background as I do, and who share their English LBC journeys.

### **Phill**

LBC may elicit a spectrum of ideas varying from person to person. This subjective view can be explained through the concept of *Umwelt*, which is simply explained as experiencing our subjective universe while sharing the same environment (Chang, 2009). As in the Japanese proverb 十人十色 [*jūnin toiro*; 10 people, 10 colors], each individual's own idea of LBC is influenced by their learning histories, values, customs, beliefs, and an infinite number of other variables.

LBC holds a particular place in my learning history, as it is how I would summarize, for better or worse, the majority of my lifelong learning experience. This is due to my learning preferences coupled with institutional and structural barriers that I have faced in my learning journey. I would like to share two very general but personal aspects of my LBC experience which are in some capacity touched on in this issue. First, in relation to learning preferences, LBC is something that I have always valued as a learner because it led to opportunities for hands-on learning in real-life situations. It's one thing to do math problems in class or homework assignments; however, applying a subject of study (math, language, chemistry, etc.) takes on a new life when using it to solve real-world problems. Related to this concept, in junior high school, I would help my father do tile work in people's kitchens and bathrooms. Although the math was basic, it gave me an appreciation for how what I was learning in class could be utilized outside of it. In other words, LBC helped me understand the value of what was being taught in the classroom. Another insight is that LBC can provide learners with greater opportunities for self-expression (e.g., language use, behavior that is taboo in classroom settings, and more freedom for exploration); I learned how to play instruments and genres of music that were not taught in school by starting bands with friends, playing live shows, and recording albums. This experience gave me the opportunity not only to learn electric bass and guitar, but to also learn an array of skills ranging from songwriting and music production to project management and sales.

The second aspect of LBC that connects to my learning history is that it helped mitigate the effect of barriers that impeded access to in-classroom learning opportunities. These barriers included environmental factors closely tied to social class and more intangible concepts of cultural capital (Block, 2014; Bourdieu, 1986), such as identity, beliefs, behaviors, etc. With regards to social class, the barriers I experienced were related to the cost of access to educational opportunities and lesser public educational resources relative to the surrounding communities. When discussing issues of cultural capital, access was also levied institutionally and structurally due to my being part of a racial and ethnic minority in the United States (e.g., prejudice based on my accent, dialect, hair style, dress,

and skin color). Although I was never legally barred from educational resources, through racial profiling, dress codes, and otherizing, learning environments such as libraries, student groups, and classroom discussions were at times quite unwelcoming. However, through accessing websites, belonging to local music scenes, and learning various skills at part-time jobs, I was able to gain the skills and knowledge which were paramount in gaining access to and satisfying standardized levels of academic achievement and certifications.

Lastly, one major factor of LBC which I would like to add is the importance of the role teachers, mentors, and peers all play in LBC, because without the key component of community, learning, in my opinion, is impossible. Although not a panacea, LBC opportunities generally allow less expensive options for access to education (e.g., massive open online courses, or MOOCs) or at the very least opportunities to continue learning at no additional cost. Further, as practitioners, it is crucial that we support and promote students in LBC because it allows them to learn in spaces that they find safe, welcoming, and familiar and can mitigate the effects of learning environments that result in alienation. These are just some of the many ways LBC can be operationalized as you will see in this issue.

### **André**

As both a language learner and a language teacher, I have always believed in the importance of LBC. When I first began working at a conversation school here in Japan, I was asked not only to teach English but French as well. Thanks to this opportunity, I began reviewing a language I had not studied for a couple of years as my focus had turned to Japanese. Going back to French and basically relearning it to teach my students gave me the opportunity not only to build my skills once again using a wide range of materials, but it also allowed me the chance to interact with French speakers online. Later, in order to develop my language skills further, I decided to take part in a short-term study abroad program in the south of France. During my time as a conversation school teacher, I also decided to take the Japanese Language Proficiency Test and would spend hours every day studying and reviewing kanji, grammar, and vocabulary and practicing reading and listening using a wide range of resources. Based on my own learning experiences with both languages, I started encouraging all my students to study or review on their own using as many resources as they could find, knowing firsthand that just practicing once a week would not lead to fluency. Indeed, it was during this time that I was able to strengthen both languages, which was the result of much learning beyond the classroom.

Upon becoming a lecturer, I was able to learn even more advanced Japanese through my daily interactions with faculty and office staff and the various paperwork I had to fill out. I still remember having to learn words such as 購入する [*kōnyū suru*; purchase] instead of 買う [*kau*; buy], as that was the vocabulary commonly used in the office. It was also quite motivating when some of the faculty who had known me before heard me speak Japanese a few years later and told me they were impressed at how much I had improved.

It was also at this time that I opened our university's first self-access language learning center to provide students with a space and a variety of resources and services to foster more autonomous learning. Over the last couple of years, however, I have started to look beyond the physical space and have embraced online learning with its wealth of resources and possibilities. By doing so, I believe I can help remove the barriers that exist in physical spaces and allow students more freedom to take control over their learning beyond the classroom.

It is with this mindset and experience in both my own learning and now supporting my students' learning beyond such physical spaces that led me to participate in this project. By reading and commenting on the various papers in this issue, I have gained new insights into this topic as well as learned new ways of possibly helping my students become better learners beyond such physical spaces.

In our narratives above, we, the four editors, have explained why LBC is important to us and why we promote it as teachers and advisors. Although our personal and learning experiences are quite different in terms of interests and contexts, we have all used LBC to attain our individual goals. André, Isra, and Vola's LBC experiences were especially related to language learning involving personal interests and motivation. On the other hand, Phill's experience shows that LBC is not just limited to language learning but is also necessary for other areas of life. Together, we feel that our experiences as well as our writers' have helped to develop this issue into a cohesive unit which readers will be able to relate to.

### **Development of This Issue**

The writing process for the *Learner Development Journal* differs somewhat from other academic publications; this finished product represents the culmination of a 2-year process. The issue began not with a call for papers, but for *proposals* for submissions. Writers initially shared brief proposals for an inquiry they planned to undertake or a topic they wished to explore more. This allowed for a diverse group of contributions; although some of our authors had their research clearly planned out and were already underway, others were still working through their ideas. We sought proposals for longer "explorations" as well as for "practice-based reviews." The latter differed from traditional academic book reviews in that we were hoping for authors not only to review a book (or a portion of one), but to include reflections on their own practices (as educators, researchers, or even as learners themselves) and use those reflections as a lens through which to view the piece in question.

We on the editorial team selected a group of contributors we were excited to work with and grouped them into "response communities," or small groups within which the authors could provide feedback to, and share reflections with each other as their papers developed. Members of the editorial team also joined each community to scaffold discussions and provide support from a slightly more objective standpoint for fostering the development of the papers. These communities are a unique feature of *LDJ*. In line with constructivist theories of learning, we felt through interacting with others, sharing different perspectives, and coming to understand those perspectives, writers might re-shape their existing understandings and create new meanings together (see Fosnot & Perry, 2005). That this type of shared learning conforms favorably with constructivist and sociocultural theoretical perspectives also seemed appropriate for the four of us as editors, as both theoretical viewpoints play important underlying roles in the field of language advising (Mynard, 2012), which is a major part of our professional practices. Furthermore, in Isra's case, the feedback and interaction with members of his group in the previous issue of this journal (*LDJ5*) had been valuable in crafting his paper (Wongsarnpigoon & Imamura, 2021).

After the formation of the communities, the authors started commenting on each other's proposals using Google Docs and met online in Zoom to share and discuss their upcoming work with each other in March and April 2021. They then began their writing

process, sharing their first partial piece of writing within their communities in May 2021, again commenting on each other's work in Google Docs and meeting online over the following month. These meetings and comments ideally gave the authors momentum to continue their writing during the summer vacation period, after which they submitted a full (or nearly full) working draft in September 2021.

Contributors' working drafts were each reviewed by two members of the *LDJ* Review Network. Authors were asked to select either open (non-anonymous) or double-blind review. In either case, we attempted to match each author with reviewers who would be well suited to provide feedback on their paper due to their areas of expertise or previous research. In the autumn of 2021, the reviewers provided supportive feedback on each paper, in line with the journal's and the Learner Development SIG's goal of helping to *develop* the writers and their writing. Similar to the dialogic process of building new understandings in the response communities, a key part of this review process was our desire to facilitate a constructive dialogue, and as such, we encouraged the authors to respond to the reviewers' comments and pose questions of their own.

Using the reviewers' feedback, the authors submitted revised full drafts in February 2022. Although we on the editorial team had posed questions and given encouraging comments throughout the process, at this point we stepped in and positioned ourselves in a more traditional editorial stance. Throughout the spring of 2022, we provided editorial direction and feedback on all papers; the *LDJ* Steering Group also gave their own feedback. We had been present throughout the development of the papers from the start, and so receiving this feedback from the members of the Steering Group, who were reading the papers with fresh eyes, was highly valuable. After spending the summer of 2022 responding to the feedback in revising and writing, the authors submitted their final drafts in September 2022. Two subsequent rounds of proofreading and final revisions resulted in the completed finished works you see here.

Throughout this process, as editors, our focus has been on supporting our contributors in developing not only their pieces but also their own voices as authors of their inquiries into learning beyond the classroom. The contributors to this issue have varying degrees of experience in writing, but it is fair to say that all of the pieces have changed and evolved during this publication process. As editors, seeing this growth has been one of the most satisfying parts of working on this issue. It is also a huge credit to our writers that they have taken all feedback in the positive spirit of the journal and used it to their benefit.

## **In This Issue**

Reinders and Benson (2017) suggest a research agenda for LBC with several strands. These include:

1. explorations of settings for LBC (e.g., how it connects with the classroom, or how learners may tie opportunities for LBC in their own environments with the classroom),
2. the processes involved (e.g., the experience of LBC or the strategies or technology involved), and
3. teachers' support for LBC (e.g., teachers' beliefs or how teachers may prepare learners for LBC)



We believe that the seven papers assembled in this issue—six longer explorations of LBC and one practice-based review—each apply to one or more of these strands in various ways.

### ***Ann Flanagan, “Building a Critical Reflective Practice With High School Language Learners”***

In our first paper, Ann Flanagan explores her efforts to promote critical reflection in high school students. She provided support for her learners' goal setting, and they kept reflective journals on their learning activities beyond the classroom, as well as on their progress towards their goals. Ann examines how two particular students' reflections helped them to more closely examine their own study strategies, habits, and resources, as well as how she was able to foster their reflective practice. She also muses upon the nature of the feedback she can provide in order to improve students' reflection.

### ***Gretchen Clark, “Extensive Listening in the Time of COVID-19: Supporting Students so They Can Become Self-Reflective, Independent Learners”***

In her paper, Gretchen Clark describes how extensive listening combined with digital journal writing helped a group of university students develop their metacognitive skills and increase their opportunities for listening practice beyond the classroom. Although the practices she describes were specially designed due to the pandemic when face-to-face classes were not being conducted, they can be equally helpful even after the COVID-19 pandemic, as they enable students to gradually develop their autonomy.

### ***Jon Rowberry, “Agency in and Beyond the Classroom: Learners' Selection of Resources for Self-Directed Language Learning”***

In the third paper, Jon Rowberry describes how two learners in a self-directed learning course called SDLU take charge of their learning by making use of the affordances for learning in SDLU. Through the two case studies, Jon shows the differences between the ways the two learners selected their resources and the amount of support they needed from others. Jon ends his paper by considering some challenges teachers and learning advisors may have when facilitating self-directed learning courses, and sharing some unexpected realizations about the two learners' agency.

### ***Chika Hayashi, “A Case Study of Collaborative Online International Learning Between Finnish and Japanese University Students: Learning Beyond the Classroom”***

In her paper, Chika investigates the potential for collaboration through an out-of-class online activity involving students in Finland and Japan participating in a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project. Using a case-study approach that included analysis of one of her Japanese students' exchanges with a Finnish student over four months, and interviews with her student at the end of the project, Chika shows that while the student was able to work together with the Finnish student, her language learning anxiety, especially with regards to accuracy, prevented her from fully engaging in the project. Nevertheless, the project did help the student better understand her needs and aided her motivation. Chika concludes by suggesting some implications for teachers interested in setting up such projects.

**Aya Hayasaki, “Beyond the Classroom, Beyond the Track: The Role of English in the Transformation of Career Perspectives in Three Females in Rural Japan”**

In this paper, Aya Hayasaki addresses topics which deserve serious consideration but are sometimes overlooked in language education, especially in Japan: the barriers imposed on academic and career prospects by inequalities tied to gender, socioeconomic, and regional differences. Aya writes about how project-based language learning beyond the classroom helped three female high school graduates from rural Kagoshima, Japan to surmount such constraints. Drawing on Trajectory Equifinality Modeling, Aya discusses how they were affected by social and educational inequalities, as well as the specific factors brought about through LBC that helped them to discover their own paths. She also compares the three women’s circumstances with her own background.

**Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa, Haingo Fanaperana Rajaonaritiana, and Volatiana Olivia Rasoanindrina, “Learning Beyond the Classroom in an EFL Malagasy Setting: Two Student Teachers’ Experiences”**

In their paper, Vola, Fanaperana, and Olivia discuss the importance of learning beyond the classroom in Madagascar, a context that so far has been little researched. Through the use of language learning histories (LLHs), they show how one’s interests, not just in the language itself but also in the culture of the places where it is spoken, can help a learner strengthen and maintain their motivation to continue studying a foreign language. Based on their findings, they argue that teachers should consider ways to incorporate such interests and strategies used outside the classroom into the classroom, and that teacher education should include more reflection on student teachers’ LLHs as this can benefit future teachers’ practices.

**Mizuka Tsukamoto, “Some Thoughts on Implementing a New Teaching Approach: A Review of Clarke’s ‘Exploring Autonomous Learning . . .’”**

In the final piece, Mizuka Tsukamoto provides a chapter review that explores a practitioner’s approach to teaching a university English class. Mizuka details her experience implementing similar concepts to those in Clarke’s chapter with the aim of creating a student-centered classroom. In reviewing Clarke’s account of her practice and research, Mizuka reflects on some of the parallels and differences with her own teaching. Through this reflective process, Mizuka was able to answer some of her questions as well as uncover new ones related to creating a classroom that is student centered and facilitates learner autonomy.

**Commentary**

**Phil Benson and Mayumi Kashiwa, “Space Matters: Language Learning Environments Beyond the Classroom in the Post-COVID World”**

In their dialogic commentary on this issue, Phil Benson and Mayumi Kashiwa discuss LBC with regard to spaces in the post-COVID world. They explore the conceptualization of space (see Benson, 2021), learner perceptions of learning environments, and the complexity of digital spaces in relation to learning environments both in and beyond the classroom. Drawing out fascinating connections and questions to do with learner

development, Phil and Mayumi point readers towards intriguing pathways for future research on learning beyond the classroom.

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The editors would like to thank everyone involved in the publication of this journal. We would first like to thank the reviewers for taking the time not only to check the papers but also offer valuable comments to the writers. We would also like to thank Stuart Warrington for his contribution in the initial stages of this journal, as well as Kayoko Horai for helping to proofread and edit the Japanese abstracts, and Ivan Lombardi for the layout and design. Next, we would like to express our gratitude to both Mayumi Kashiwa and Phil Benson for their insightful commentary on the issue. Finally, we would like to give a special thanks to all the contributors for sharing their various experiences with language learning beyond the classroom. We hope the research herein will offer new insights and open new venues for research in this ever-expanding and important field.

— Isra Wongsarnpigoon, Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa,  
Phillip A. Bennett, and André Parsons  
December 2022

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### **LD Journal 6 Japanese Editing and Proofreading**

Kayoko Horai, Sojo University, Japan

### **LD Journal Steering Group**

Andy Barfield, Chuo University, Japan  
Oana Cusen, Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan  
Dominic Edsall, Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine, Japan  
Tanya McCarthy, Kyoto University, Japan

### **Layout and Design**

Ivan Lombardi, University of Fukui, Japan