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The Learner Development Journal Issue 9:  
Engaging With and Exploring Autonomy, Creativity, and Well-Being  
for Learner Development

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**Authors:** Stacey Vye, Robert Moreau, & Ivan Lombardi

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**Author contact:** <vyesl(at)mail(dot)saitama-u(dot)ac(dot)jp>, <r\_moreau(at)meiji(dot)ac(dot)jp>, <ivan(at)u-fukui(dot)ac(dot)jp>

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This article is part of a collection of practitioner research on the theme of “Engaging With and Exploring Autonomy, Creativity, and Well-Being for Learner Development” for Issue 9 of the Learner Development Journal (LDJ9), edited by Stacey Vye, Robert Moreau, and Ivan Lombardi. 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 the Learner Development Journal Issue 9: Engaging With and Exploring Autonomy, Creativity, and Well-Being for Learner Development

**Stacey Vye**, Saitama University, Saitama, Japan  
<vyesl(at)mail(dot)saitama-u(dot)ac(dot)jp>

**Robert Moreau**, Meiji University, Tokyo, Japan  
<r\_moreau(at)meiji(dot)ac(dot)jp>

**Ivan Lombardi**, University of Fukui, Fukui, Japan  
<ivan(at)u-fukui(dot)ac(dot)jp>

What happens when autonomy, creativity, and well-being meet in the same room—a Zoom room!—and four passionate researchers (Stacey, Robert, Ivan, and Amelia Yarwood, who played a major editorial role in the early and mid-stages) start tossing around ideas, questions, frameworks, and proposals? The result is *energy* mixed with *curiosity* generated through enjoyable discussions. In introducing this issue of the *Learner Development Journal*, we attempt to capture that energy and curiosity in a dialogue between editors, a reflection on how the process of curating this issue became a story of learning in itself.

### Living the Themes: The LDJ9 Story

**Ivan:** When I joined the already stacked LDJ9 editorial team, I could not have imagined the discussions, decisions, discoveries, delays, frustrations, and sparks of joy that would carry us, editors and authors, through the next 18 months. My preconceived idea of editing a collection of papers being akin to lining up six drafts and finding a neat theme to stitch them together was utterly different from the outcome. The process leading to what you are reading now was more like living alongside the ideas and different schedules and time zones of six authors, engaging in discussions with them in small groups and individually, cheering them on, sometimes sending the extra email, and ultimately discovering that, taken together, their voices are distinct, but coherently painting a picture of autonomy, creativity, and well-being from the perspectives of the language practitioner-researcher and the language learner. Ana, Fergal, Tomohide, Mark, Masako, and Nathan do not just *discuss* the themes of LDJ9. Instead, they fully embrace them at the professional and personal level, as you will discover through reading their *stories* of practice.

**Stacey:** Yes, I agree, the authors fully embrace the themes of LDJ9 through the iterative, reflective process of the LDJ9 issue. We established response communities (RCs) in which authors and editors met online over 18 months to support, reflect on, and expand the pieces of writing that would become the articles published in this journal. Within the themes of autonomy, creativity, and well-being interwoven throughout the articles, we grouped the authors and their pieces based on commonalities in

the proposals. For me, the time zones and varying schedules created a symphony of chaos, akin to aligning a Rubik's Cube. Robert, how was the process for you?

**Robert:** For me, working with a response community discussion group was something new, and it was interesting to hear the writers' opinions about their work in a way that extended beyond LDJ9. For example, listening to authors share their classroom practices and hearing them describe the experiences that led them to write for the journal. Throughout this process, a challenge that arose for me was that one author needed to leave the project, and I felt that having only one editor and one writer's voice in the RC limited the ability to generate new ideas. I was happy when Stacey agreed to sit in with Nathan and me so that we could share and develop ideas together. I concur that growth within our community of writers and editors could be felt, especially within the RC groups.

**Stacey:** So true, Robert. I also felt that way after two co-authors left the project in my RC. A few authors dropped out of the project for various reasons, but because they had established bonds in the RCs, read and reflected on their peers' writing, some volunteered to review later drafts, which turned out to be mutually beneficial to the learning community. Ivan, our four initial subthemes have evolved into six distinct articles in their own right, based on multiple reflections from the LDJ community and the authors incorporating the voices of others, their learners, and themselves. How do you see these new connections since our initial framework 18 months ago?

**Ivan:** I would say they all began as puzzles. In the spirit of action research and exploratory practice, each author wrestled with something slippery; for example, how to scaffold learner autonomy, how to open a creative space for learning, and how to keep well-being in view instead of a "it would be nice to have" background assumption. As editors, we watched and consulted with the authors as they came to grips with how to tackle their struggles or explain how they overcame classroom issues. We had front row seats to their successes in fostering autonomy and creativity, sometimes in unexpected ways, and we noticed how well-being often appeared at the edges of the content, quietly holding things together until suddenly it became the central focus, as learner and teacher well-being is an integral part of being human in the learning process.

This dynamic becomes immediately clear in our opening story of practice. [Ana](#) (Cruz, 2025) takes us inward to explore her work with meditation, constructed on the L2 motivational self system theory (L2MSS, see Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), painting a picture of how stillness and reflection can become *active* tools for learning (Dörnyei, 2005). The protagonist of her story is Fred, a learner whose journey moving from stress and uncertainty toward self-kindness and confidence is one we read with trepidation—an emotion seldom elicited in academic papers. Ana's analysis and discussion were eye-opening for me, especially in her argument that well-being involves more than lowering stress levels and branches into fostering the imagination that helps learners envision themselves as language users. Reading Ana's take on creativity and mindfulness being companions, and not opposites, was enlightening—and how well she captured the spirit of LDJ9, touching upon all three themes, is remarkable.

**Stacey:** What stood out to me was how Ana used the L2MSS framework to work with Fred, exploring his unique language learning experiences and helping him develop autonomy and well-being through creativity. Identifying his current L2 self seemed

to serve as a starting point for visualizing his creative language journey and for self-reflection, including exploring his ought-to self as he considered possible actions. The reflective practices that Ana suggested helped him envision his ideal future self as part of his learning trajectory. A second theoretical underpinning she introduced to Fred was the complex adaptive system (CAS), which highlighted the complexity of his language learning and its adaptivity, involving specific elements and agents that interact in nonlinear, dynamic ways (Larson-Freeman, 1997). Applying CAS to his own practices and development provided him with a framework to question his language learning and career trajectory while embracing new elements of learning through heightened metacognition, thanks to Ana's support, which was profoundly emotionally rewarding for him. I will refrain from any further spoilers to this lovely article. Robert, what was your take on Ana's research?

**Robert:** I was also intrigued by reading about CAS and its connection to language learning. I was particularly fascinated with the role of reflective narratives in order to understand these complex systems. Also, as the role of creativity in language learning is a central theme in this issue of the LDJ, a key takeaway from Ana's article for me was the importance of embracing new and unfamiliar ideas, as well as the unpredictable results associated with learning a new language in order to become more creative. That was a puzzle, which leads us to [Fergal's](#) (Bradley, 2025) article. Ivan, what's your take?

**Ivan:** Fergal's contribution drew me into—you said it very well Robert—another puzzle: What does it mean to require a "social element" in an autonomy-focused course? To me, it is especially interesting to know how learners interpret this, since there is no consensus on what "social language learning" entails. No spoilers, but listening to Fergal's students, it becomes clear that for some, it had the connotation of discussion and group work. For others, it meant written exchange, peer feedback, and all the way to moral support. Fergal's reflections (and his willingness to let theory and practice blur together) reminded me that autonomy is not necessarily an individual achievement, but it can arise from the encounter of different people, the use of different objects, and the blending of other ideas as the actor-network theory (ANT) introduced in this story of practice suggest (see Latour, 2005), and that the role of a language practitioner who engages in self-reflection is vital to the success of a language course. Back to you, Robert—how did this story of practice speak to you?

**Robert:** I found Fergal's article enlightening, especially the notion that language learning is complex and labels that make it seem simple can be deceiving. I think that the positive spin that Fergal places on this complexity is that it can be useful for promoting alternative ways to approach our classroom contexts. This article, with its description of ANT, may be of interest to teachers looking to create diverse, challenging, and more social activities in their classrooms. I also found that in Fergal and Ana's work, both writers made connections between complexity in language learning as a catalyst for creativity in the classroom. Stacey, I believe that you had some thoughts on this as well, right?

**Stacey:** I sure do. By reflecting on dynamic theories, Fergal, Ana, and Tomohide (the author of the next piece) also drew on language learning theories and learning practices that blurred and re-created the learning constructs into something new in their pieces. It makes me curious to wonder what would happen if Fred were willing to reflect on ANT from Fergal's framework and come up with new learning reflections

as he did with L2MSS or CAS? Regarding Fergal's article, not only was the intricate coding of the students' voices, which described their socially situated learning, salient and consequential for me as a reader, but also the coding of his reflections, juxtaposed with those of his learners, intrigued me. I am looking forward to Ivan's take on [Tomohide's](#) (Warabi, 2025) project; over to you, Ivan.

**Ivan:** Thank you! Tomohide's learners are high school students who take a compulsory English course and who are suddenly asked to engage in a project-based learning (PBL) project and attempt a deceptively simple task: writing a collaborative fiction story in English. What they produced after months of plot twists and deadlines was not just stories, but testaments to learner autonomy in action (and a surprising parallel to the process of making LDJ9 happen!). I like how Tomohide hints at autonomy not being a matter of working *by oneself*, on one's own terms. In his and his learners' story, autonomy included navigating conflict, finding compromise, and keeping the story and enthusiasm alive when things seemed stuck. The learners' creativity shone through their hard work of weaving disparate voices into one coherent "world" (again, strikingly similar to the LDJ9 process!). While reading, I could feel the class's energy and youth, the realization of having accomplished a coherent project together, and each seemed to have grown as a learner, a "team player," and eventually a person. From the perspective of PBL, which is in your expertise, Robert, what are your reflections on it?

**Robert:** Yes, I teach several classes in which students engage in PBL, so although Tomohide's context is different from mine, I could easily relate to the ideas in the article. The focus on collaboration and creative solutions is important, as this can definitely be something that can be transferred to other group-based projects. It is as Ivan mentioned above, the lessons learned from doing the creative writing activity may eventually be transferred beyond the classroom to become practical life skills. Stacey, what was your take on our third story of practice?

**Stacey:** Sure, I learned that Tomohide seemed to be a composer on two fronts. Firstly, he gathered a lot of literature to collect, improvise, and refine several times, which drew in the complexity of several working parts for PBL: a story plot pyramid developed in the 19th century, a needs analysis, and Cockburn's (2005) "keep, problem, and try" (KPT) reflection method. It was as if Tomohide was conducting an orchestra and creating an original musical composition for the framework of his study. Secondly, as both of you mentioned, the learners negotiated, compromised, kept the story alive, and were pleased with their accomplishments. I also felt that Tomohide's role as a composer guided the students to problem-solve in a collaboration to avoid relying on AI. Instead, they worked as humans together to create masterpieces that they could fully own. Tomohide's connection to [Mark's](#) (Johnson, 2025) story of practice is the acknowledgement of the struggle of being human and the care required to thrive. Ivan will introduce us to Mark's journey.

**Ivan:** Mark indeed takes us on a journey, and one made of emotions; unlike Ana's, Mark's contribution carries the emotional weight of isolation and loss during the pandemic. I was in awe of his resilience, allowing the tragic experiences he describes in his story of practice to reshape his language teaching practice, embracing them instead of pushing them aside. As a result, in his university communication classes, well-being became somewhat of a *design principle*. Mark adjusted the assessments to reduce stress for his learners, rather than the opposite; similarly, he chose to put

peer collaboration at the forefront, encouraging learners to create relations, build trust, and reflect on their learning. These tools for awareness of one's well-being were woven into the very fabric of the course Mark describes, always visible and negotiated with the learners, and deliberately framed as a safe harbor. His students' voices, unfiltered, reflect on their connections and discoveries, reminding us that learning is a fundamentally human and social endeavor, inseparable from the conditions under which it takes place. Care is not a luxury—it is the architecture of a classroom. Stacey, I am curious about your take.

**Stacey:** Well, as Mark noted, care is the key to the well-being of all classroom participants, so yes, the architecture, including the scaffolding that supports a strong foundation for learning. Without care, health, learning, and well-being are in jeopardy. Therefore, eliciting students' peer feedback for support can promote camaraderie and team building, done carefully. Mark's and my situation are very similar, which was a challenge for me. I am also at a national university, so you will have to read his experience during the pandemic to know that I, too, felt nervous about being required to come back face-to-face teaching for foreign language classes during the pandemic, when the professors in other faculties could continue to teach remotely. And I, too, have had many friends and family pass away much too young, so I wondered why I feel a bit more at peace. Then, the pin dropped. In my case, the causes were gradual illnesses, not accidents and suicides, up until recently, so there was a willingness for these dear souls to try to live: I could be in contact with these friends and loved ones as much as I could, and was able to say goodbye for now. Sorry, Rob, this article got me in a good way. I am a little emotional here, so over to you: What do you think?

**Robert:** The personal connections that Mark wrote at the beginning of his article were quite moving and really highlight the need to focus on well-being in our profession. In my classes, I try to create a sense of community, both between myself and the students and between the students themselves. The idea of constructive praise in peer reviews resonated strongly with me. That this practice can lead not only to improved class atmosphere, but also to greater learner participation in class activities is useful knowledge for all language teachers.

**Ivan:** Well said, Robert. Next, let's look at [Masako's](#) (Nunn, 2025) Japanese literature course. Strongly rooted in Bloom's taxonomy, the course structure she chose to implement functioned like a set of stepping stones for her learners. Equipped with carefully designed supports, they discovered they could analyze, compare, and even create in a language and cultural space that at first seemed intimidating. As is often reported in learner development literature, in Masako's case as well, the scaffolds did not restrict autonomy, but rather launched it. Reading this story of practice, I found myself thinking that being a language practitioner-researcher is a quiet art, where the center of the stage is taken fully by the learners, and the designer/researcher/teacher becomes more like a director or manager.

**Robert:** I found that as in Tomohide's article, Masako emphasises the importance of creativity in language learning in describing her students' enjoyment in crafting new stories. She explains how this enjoyment enhances learners' motivation, allowing them to engage more easily with challenging tasks. Masako also reminds us of the importance of appropriate scaffolding in fostering autonomous learning in our classrooms.

**Stacey:** Yes, Masako was careful to provide supportive supplementary materials, allowing her students to read and interact with classical Japanese tales written hundreds of years ago. It must have taken dedication to provide extra content. She utilized an interpretive multiple-case study methodology (Yin, 2018) with her former students through interviews, surveys, observations, and class discussions. My two main takeaways were, first, the importance of Masako's own reflections in expanding her exploration of learner autonomy through the learners' self-selection of content. And second, how the learners creatively explored different ways of thinking in an ancient culture, while thoroughly enjoying the metacognition of placing themselves within tales written during the 11th to 18th centuries in feudal Japan, as if they had gone back in time. Now that is improvisation! I think that is why we placed Masako's story of practice before the practice-related review, because both articles focus on the spirit of improvisation. Ivan, over to you!

**Ivan:** Thanks, Stacey! In LDJ9's featured practice-related review, [Nathan](#) (Cohen, 2025) plays with the creativity of language as if a classroom were a jazz band. He takes us along an euphonic journey of how he felt inspired by *Creativity in Language Teaching: Perspectives from Research and Practice* (Jones & Richards, 2016), exploring the idea of "creative speaking" in an inspired piece that really feels less like reading a review and more like being invited to an improv concert. I enjoyed reading about his classes, where language learning is framed as something that is accompanied by, and sometimes provokes, laughter, surprise, and new points of view. He quotes Jones and Richards (2016) in seeing creativity as the testing ground for the "novel and unpredictable" factor of language use, and I love that—connecting the dots between dialogic pedagogy and the flair of comedy, reminding us that learning a language is, after all, a form of improv performance. I found myself smiling as I read this. What shines through is that creativity is a mood, not the final product of something, and it is something that unites every actor involved in the language learning and teaching process.

**Robert:** I enjoyed how the tone of Nathan's article reflects the content of Chappell (2016), with its emphasis on humor and making class discussions creative. As mentioned above, he reminds readers how unexpected, surprising turns in classroom dialogues can create interest not only for the students, but quite possibly for the teacher as well. This practice-related review made me think of the improvisational aspects of language teaching and the importance of flexibility in a teacher's approach to classroom instruction.

**Stacey:** Oh, wow, Ivan and Rob, you have both taken all my vocabulary away. Well done! And we are nearing our word count, too! Nathan made me laugh out loud several times as he used comedy and improv in the classroom, drawing inspiration from Chappell's (2016) "Creativity through inquiry dialogue" chapter in Jones and Richard's (2016) edited book. In doing so, Nathan developed his creative speaking method in the classroom, but you will have to read his review to find out, while you laugh at the same time. As we close the introduction, Ivan, what strikes you about the six pieces of writing that have evolved over 18 months?

**Ivan:** What strikes me, looking back over these six pieces in their final form (it seems yesterday that they were short drafts!), is how they don't fall into one category of "autonomy," "creativity," "well-being," as the theme chosen for LDJ9 may suggest. Instead, they overlap, crisscross, and bleed into each other. Autonomy is clearly a fundamental

scaffold for all of the six writers' practice and research. Creativity emerges in their planning and teaching, learners' discussions, and meditative contemplations. Well-being is, overtly or covertly, an important gear in the mechanism of their teaching and learning situations, and it takes shape as diverse as self-recognition, communal laughter, and peer communities. What I learned through this editorial process is that none of these three concepts stands alone, but rather they feed each other and, in doing so, they give a practice-based, tangible picture of what learner development means.

**Stacey:** I agree, and I will not spoil [Christina's](#) commentary (Gkonou, 2025) concluding the whole of LDJ9. A world-renowned specialist in creativity, autonomy, and well-being, Christina offers readers a genuine treat with her insightful contribution to this issue. Not only does she provide her expert view on how each theme was interconnectedly represented in the articles, as Ivan mentioned; she also identifies three additional themes, the first of which is unique to this issue: the dual role of the teacher as a vulnerable (and brave, I dare say) practitioner-researcher. The other two themes that resonated with her are, we think, in the spirit of the *Learner Development Journal's* collaborative process itself: a concern with person-centered narratives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) regarding identity and becoming. These concepts are central to learner development, as learning is the act of becoming—exploring the possibilities of what an individual might become. This involves not only learning a language, but also learning that crafts our identities creatively through autonomy as agency and with the utmost care for our well-being. Christina's salient comments on these themes are significantly meaningful to the authors, the reviewers, the issue editors, and the journal steering group.

**Ivan:** If you made it all the way here, dear reader, we hope that the journey ahead will be full of discovery, as it was for us, all learners, authors, and editors alike! It is also our hope that the contributions in this issue of the *Learner Development Journal* will inspire your practice, bring new perspectives to some puzzles you may have encountered as part of your language teaching or learning experiences, and—why not!—inspire you to explore one of these puzzles in a future issue of the journal.

## Acknowledgments

We feel our introduction would not be complete without thanking one by one all the people who contributed to making LDJ9 a reality. Let us start with the authors: Ana, Fergal, Mark, Masako, Nathan, and Tomohide—thank you so much for your sustained commitment to this long journey, and for sharing your personal and professional collaboration with the readers and us. A heartfelt thank you goes to Christina, who accepted the monumental task of reading the entire issue and writing a commentary in an extremely busy time of her personal life and academic career. LDJ9 would not have felt complete without this.

We next extend our gratitude to the LDJ9 reviewers for helping the authors with their expertise and insight. We cannot name you directly to protect the identity of the blind peer reviewers, but you know who you are—thank you! And we shall not forget to thank the Steering Group for their guidance and tireless work behind the scenes throughout the two years of this journey. Andy, Huw, Yuri—it is safe to say this project could not have reached its conclusion without your precious and steadfast assistance.

Since Ivan was responsible for the layout and design of this issue, Robert and Stacey would like to acknowledge his work here, sparing him the awkwardness of thanking himself.

His experience with the layout workflow really helped the other editors learn the process quickly with humor, grit, and patience with all of our different schedules.

Finally, we owe one particularly warm and sincere THANK YOU to **Amelia Yarwood**. Amelia's contribution is woven into the very fabric of the LDJ9 project, which she joined from its earliest moments. Together, we shaped the call for proposals and built all our working structures, and we were in awe of Amelia's ability to manage working documents, communications, and response communities. Although circumstances meant that Amelia was unable to remain with us through the final stages, the issue of the *Learner Development Journal* you are reading is very much the product of her work alongside ours, and we are deeply grateful for the organization, thoughtfulness, and dedication she brought to these collaborative endeavors.

## Author Bios

**Stacey Vye** is a professor and director of the Center for English Education and Development at Saitama University. She earned her doctoral degree (EdD) in Organizational Change and Leadership from the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education and her MA in TESOL from Teachers College, Columbia. Her research interests are learner and teacher autonomy, the connections between both constructs, as teachers are learners, too. In addition, she's passionate about creatively solving problems to promote well-being, agency, and goal achievement. She has been connected with the JALT Learner Development SIG in various capacities since 2002.

**خانم ستیسی و آی استاد و مدیر «مرکز آموزش و توسعه زبان انگلیسی» در دانشگاه سائیتاما هستند. ایشان درجه دکتری حرفه‌ای خود را در حوزه «تحول سازمانی و رهبری» از دانشکده آموزش و پرورش راسیر دانشگاه کالیفرنیا جنوبی دریافت کرده‌اند و مدرک کارشناسی‌ارشد خود را نیز در رشته «آموزش زبان انگلیسی» از کالج معلمان دانشگاه کلمبیا اخذ کرده‌اند. پژوهش‌های ایشان بر خودآیینی یادگیرنده و مدرس و رابطه میان این دو تمرکز دارد؛ با این رویکرد که مدرسان نیز همواره در فرایند یادگیری قرار دارند. افزون بر این، خانم و آی علاقه‌مند است با حل خلاقانه مسائل به بهبود رفاه و بهزیستی، تقویت عاملیت و گسترش یادگیری مستقل کمک کند. ایشان از سال ۲۰۰۲ تاکنون، در نقش‌های مختلف با شاخه «توسعه یادگیرنده» در انجمن غیرانتفاعی «آموزش زبان ژاپن» همکاری فعال داشته‌اند.**

**Robert Moreau** is currently an assistant professor at Meiji University in Tokyo, Japan. He earned his MA in TESOL at Teachers College Columbia University, and has been a university instructor for more than 15 years. With a desire to motivate other teachers, and to develop his own classroom practices, Robert has pursued research in the areas of reflective practices, learner autonomy, project-based learning, and academic writing. He has been part of the Learner Development SIG since 2007. This is his first experience to be part of an LDJ editing team.

**Robert Moreau** est présentement professeur adjoint à l'Université Meiji de Tokyo, au Japon. Il a obtenu une maîtrise en enseignement de l'anglais langue étrangère (TESOL) au Collège Enseignants de l'Université Columbia. Il enseigne à l'université depuis plus de 15 ans. Ayant le désir de motiver ses collègues et de perfectionner ses pratiques pédagogiques, Robert a mené des recherches sur les pratiques réflexives, l'autonomie des apprenants, l'apprentissage par projets et la rédaction académique. Il est membre du groupe qui spécialise au développement de l'apprenant (SIG) depuis 2007. C'est la première fois qu'il fait partie de l'équipe de rédaction du LDJ.

**Ivan Lombardi** is an associate professor and researcher-practitioner at the University of Fukui, Fukui, Japan. He holds a PhD in Second Language Pedagogy from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy. A passionate language learner, his research interests intersect several facets of learner development, particularly motivation, autonomy, agency, and well-being in the language classroom—themes that sparked an interest in the focus of this issue of LDJ9. He has been involved with LD SIG publications since 2022 in various editorial and collaborative capacities.

**Ivan Lombardi** è professore associato e ricercatore attivo nella pratica professionale presso l'Università di Fukui (Giappone). Ha conseguito un dottorato di ricerca in Glottodidattica presso l'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano (Italia). Appassionato studente di lingue straniere, colloca i suoi interessi di ricerca all'intersezione di diversi ambiti dello sviluppo dell'apprendente, in particolare motivazione, autonomia, potere di azione e benessere nell'ambito della classe di lingue, temi i quali hanno ispirato la sua partecipazione in questo numero di LDJ9. Collabora con le pubblicazioni del Learner Development SIG dal 2022, ricoprendo diversi ruoli redazionali e collaborativi.

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### **LDJ Review Network**

- Mayumi Abe, Waseda University, Japan  
Anita Aden, Mukogawa Women's University, Japan  
Tim Ashwell, Komazawa University, Japan  
Erzsébet Ágnes Békés, volunteer teacher-research mentor, Ecuador  
Paul Collett, Shimonoseki City University, Japan  
Melodie Cook, University of Niigata Prefecture, Japan  
Simla Course, Akdeniz University, Turkey  
Jeremiah Dutch, Rikkyo University, Japan  
Dominic G. Edsall, University College London, Institute of Education, UK, & Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine, Japan  
Tomoko Hashimoto, Tokyo Future University, Japan  
Chika Hayashi, Seikei University, Japan  
Ellen Head, Miyazaki International College, Japan  
Daniel Hooper, Tokyo Kasei University, Japan  
Shu Hua Kao, Chihlee University of Technology, Taiwan  
Yoshitaka Kato, Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Japan  
Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan  
Hugh Nicoll, freelance/Miyazaki Municipal University, Japan  
Maria de la Paz Adelia Peña Clavel, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico  
Jim Ronald, Hiroshima Shudo University, Japan  
Colin Rundle, Soka University, Japan  
Robert Stevenson, Tamagawa University, Japan  
Akiko Takagi, Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan  
Katherine Thornton, Otomon Gakuin University, Japan  
Stacey Vye, Center for English Education and Development (CEED), Saitama University, Japan

### **LDJ Steering Group**

- Andy Barfield, Chuo University, Japan  
Huw Davies, Rikkyo University, Japan (LDJ9 liaison)  
Yuri Imamura, Shukutoku University, Japan

### **LDJ Layout & Design**

- Ivan Lombardi, University of Fukui, Japan