

Engaging With and Exploring Autonomy, Creativity, and Well-Being for Learner Development

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

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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 آای استاد و مدیر «مرکز آموزش و توسعه زبان انگلیسی» در دانشگاه سایتاما هستند. ایشان درجه دکترا در 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 آای 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.

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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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Creating Mindful L2 Selves in a Meditation-Based Activity in Higher Education

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In this story of practice I share my experience with a two-part meditation-based activity that I taught during the discipline “Applied Linguistics” which is part of the TEFL Program at the School of Modern Foreign Languages (FALEM) at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) in Brazil. Drawing on the L2 Motivational Self System Theory (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and the Complex Adaptive System (Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) that interprets additional language learning as a dynamic and open system of multiple interactions, I was interested in understanding the motivational factors of an undergraduate student that emerged in a chart, collage, and two narratives he created. The research questions that I used to guide this study concerned the aspects which contribute to increase motivation, creativity in language learning, and how the student perceives well-being inside and outside the classroom. As the methodology, I conducted the data analysis by using the six-phase thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which provides the following structure for making meaning from data: (1) becoming familiar with the data and identifying items of potential interest; (2) generating codes; (3) generating initial themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. The analysis revealed that the student saw well-being as a part of his language learning process and associated it with stress and emotion management. Furthermore, his focus on well-being enabled him to reflect on a perspective changing position, self-regulated his feelings, nurtured positive thoughts, enhanced his sense of agency, and developed a sense of belonging.

Nesta história de prática, relato minha experiência em uma atividade planejada em duas partes, inspirada na prática de meditação, que ensinei durante a disciplina “Linguística Aplicada” da Faculdade de Línguas Estrangeiras Modernas da Universidade Federal do Pará, Brasil. Com base no Sistema Motivacional Autoidentitário de L2 (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) e nos Sistemas Adaptativos Complexos (Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) em que a aprendizagem de línguas adicionais é interpretada como um sistema aberto e dinâmico de múltiplas interações, busquei compreender os fatores motivacionais de um estudante de graduação, a partir do que emergiu de uma tabela, uma colagem e duas narrativas feitas por ele. As perguntas que usei para orientar este estudo dizem respeito aos aspectos que contribuem para a promoção da motivação, da criatividade e como o aluno percebe o bem-estar dentro e fora da sala de aula. Como metodologia, utilizei a análise temática em seis fases (Braun & Clarke, 2022) que fornece a seguinte estrutura para interpretar os dados: (1) familiarizar-se com os dados e identificar itens de potencial interesse; (2) gerar códigos; (3) gerar temas iniciais; (4) revisar temas; (5) definir e nomear temas; e (6) produzir o relatório. Os resultados mostram que Fred percebeu o bem-estar como parte de seu processo de aprendizagem da língua e fez associação com o gerenciamento do estresse e emoções. Além disso, esse foco no bem-estar permitiu com que ele refletisse sobre um posicionamento de mudança de perspectiva, autorregulasse seus sentimentos, cultivasse pensamentos positivos, aumentasse seu senso de agência e desenvolvesse um senso de pertencimento.

Keywords

motivation, creativity, well-being, meditation-based class, L2 selves

motivação, criatividade, bem-estar, aula inspirada em meditação, eus-possíveis de L2

My Story With Creativity in Higher Education

I first became interested in creativity studies in 2019 as I was preparing myself to apply for the professional master’s degree in the Graduate Program in Creativity and Innovation in Higher Education Methodologies (PPGCIMES) at UFPA, being accepted into the Class of 2020. At that stage, I was also transitioning from being a toddler teacher to a pedagogical coordinator of English language, technology and innovation at the elementary and middle school where I currently work. The synchronicity of events led me to explore creativity for both academic and professional purposes.

In the syllabus of my master's degree course, the two mandatory subjects were *Creativity* and *Innovative Teaching and Learning Methods*. Both disciplines significantly contributed to my learning process and expanded my way of thinking and observing the world around me. They also enhanced my self-awareness and deepened my connection with teaching and learning processes. Back in 2020, the controversial side of studying creativity for me was that the more I delved into the topic, the more convinced I became that learners usually stop imagining at some point in their school life. In my opinion, the issue is that imagination is often considered a child-related concept, which discourages us from envisioning life as we grow older, as if imagination were not part of adult problem-solving, anticipation in future planning, or even a valuable aspect of our dreams. The duties and rush hours we adults face in our busy lifestyles diminish our will to keep wondering.

According to Robinson (2015), by the time we have been through education, schools have suppressed students' individuality, imagination, and creativity, primarily due to standardized tests. From my perspective, not much happens differently in tertiary education because of the rigidity of teaching plans and methodologies used in universities that do not cover creativity in its social and cultural dimensions. Alencar et al. (2017) stated that the development of creativity is not a priority in higher education. The authors presented several studies from different countries such as Brazil, England, and Iran that show empirical evidence of the lack of attention towards the creativity abilities of college students. Also, the study revealed that many faculty members have limited knowledge of creative approaches and are unfamiliar with the literature on creativity in educational settings.

This study resonated with me because I believe educators must cultivate a university culture that values and encourages the development and expression of students' creative potential. Back to Robinson's words, "[...] if you change the experiences of education for those you work with, you can change the world for them and in doing so become part of a wider, more complex process of change in education as a whole" (Robinson, 2015, p. 74). I believe that the best place to start thinking about how to change education is exactly where we are. In my case, and for the purposes of the current study, it means focusing on TEFL programs in higher education, where pre-service teachers can develop openness and learn to adopt different and new perspectives when dealing with challenges in their language learning path.

Considering that, as soon as I had the opportunity to teach in a higher education classroom, even if I was in my teaching internship as a doctoral student, I added to my activities what Beghetto (2016) calls "creative openings." These are unplanned opportunities during the class for developing new and meaningful actions and ways of thinking. According to Beghetto (2020, p. 20), "[...] [b]y making small openings into existing lessons and activities, students can be invited to explore, generate, and produce new ways of thinking about what they have been taught." I decided to take meditation as the path to explore how the uncertainties of creative openings are aligned with the concept of complex adaptive systems (CAS).

Hence, in this story of practice, I report a two-part meditation-based activity that I conducted in 2023 during the Applied Linguistics course offered by the School of Modern Foreign Languages (FALEM) to undergraduate students from the TEFL Program (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), Brazil. In this activity, I intertwined creativity, motivation, and well-being in the light of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) Theory (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), considering the additional language learning as a Complex Adaptive System (CAS) (Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). It was part of my teaching internship as I am a doctoral student in the Graduate Program in Language

and Literature (PPGL) at the same university. This marked a turning point in my academic life since it was the very first time that I had lectured in an undergraduate program.

In this experience, I decided to use a meditation-based activity because it allows stress management, promotes break time of quiet moments to self-regulate feelings and emotional reactivity, and displays an open mental state to nurture positive thoughts and attitudes. As Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Niemiec (2018) encourage us, it is worthwhile increasing the meditation moment by bringing more of “us” to the practice as we activate sensory awareness and attention to the joy of life. Additionally, I argue that meditation-based activities play a powerful role in promoting well-being, inviting individuals to perceive their processes and performances, such as work or learning, with greater satisfaction.

Therefore, in this story of practice, I aimed to encourage undergraduate students to be aware that, despite the additional language learning trajectory being non-linear, unpredictable, open, adaptive, and dynamic, they can create visions of self and of their future to plan long-term progression with motivation and well-being. By saying that, the research questions that I explored in this study are:

- What aspects of the meditation-based activity contribute to increase motivation and creativity in language learning?
- How can meditation-based promote well-being inside and outside the learning environment?
- How does the student perceive well-being activities as part of their language learning process?

I first provide an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, which comprises the L2MSS theory (Dörnyei, 2019; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) within the framework of additional language learning as a CAS (Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). In the same section, I discuss the creative openings concept (Beghetto, 2016, 2019, 2020) and present well-being as a topic which fluctuates in language learners’ interactions and experiences inside the classroom and beyond. This is followed by the methodology of the study, which includes the context in which I explained the connection between the L2 selves and complex adaptive systems to the students (and why I did so), the participant description, and the procedures of data collection. Then, I move on to the finding and discussion. Finally I present my concluding thoughts, which encompass my learnings and realizations.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In this section, I discuss and interrelate the theories that underpin the following discussion and findings of this story of practice.

Principles of Complex Adaptive Systems within L2 Motivational Self System Theory

The concept of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) in the context of language learning dates from the late 1990s when Larsen-Freeman (1997) published her seminal article “Chaos/complexity science and second language acquisition.” In this article, Larsen-Freeman argues that the reductionist way of examining the language learning process from its components alone, such as the teacher, the students, or the environment, is a traditional perspective that should undergo a dynamic and nonlinear paradigm shift. Since language acquisition involves the integration of diverse agents and elements, including the environment, cultural contexts, individual differences, and the language system itself, Larsen-Freeman (1997) asserted that the new principle should focus on the interactions of these factors in leading to the emergence of new patterns and behaviors. This is one of the main principles of CAS

theory, characterized by the emergent behavior of the system. It postulates that the whole is more than the sum of the parts and cannot be fully predicted by examining the individual elements in isolation.

Taking this into account, I believe the L2MSS theory proposed by Dörnyei (2005) and revised by Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) can be used to implement the CAS principle. This can be achieved by investigating how the integration of the possible selves as “parts” of one’s language learning process might mediate ongoing behaviors linked to one’s actions. The L2MSS theory comprises three elements (Dörnyei, 2005): the ideal self, the ought-to self, and the L2 learning experience.

In the beginning, the focus of the L2MSS theory was on the student’s characteristics that marked his or her individual differences. That cognitive dimension of an individual’s aptitudes was useful to language acquisition research until that moment. However, as CAS theory started attracting considerable interest across the field of Applied Linguistics, extended L2MSS theory by integrating the concept of multiple interconnected components and multiple interacting influences, which influences L2MSS theory.

Hence, I argue that the elements from L2MSS theory—the ideal self, the ought-to self, and the L2 learning experience—under the auspices of complex theory, cannot be viewed in isolation as each responds and adapts to the other. Also, both the ideal self and ought-to self lead language learners to visualize images of their roles and imagine future self-guides that are no longer understood as fixed goals, but rather as dynamic constructs in their contexts of learning (Henry & Liu, 2024; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Imagination and vision (Dörnyei, 2005) are two other concepts that were added to L2MSS theory. Learners can regulate their behavior and set their goals by projecting possible selves as a desire to act, as well as by creating and projecting images and senses from the “here-and-now self” (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) to the “not-yet self.” Metaphorically speaking, this is similar to a rehearsal of situations that have not happened yet, but are latent for potential growth and change. I find support for this in Glăveanu and Beghetto (2020), who affirm that it is only in people’s imagination that what does not exist or what could come into being is created as future-orientation. The authors call this creative experiences that are “forms of thinking, doing or making” (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2020, p. 4). Plus, anchoring this with CAS theory, it is through the imagination that we, human beings, can build a broad view of “[...] how our part fits” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 108).

In the next section, I explore how teachers can open up spaces for creative experiences in what Beghetto (2016) calls “creative openings,” where students may nurture well-being in their process of learning.

Creative Openings: Predicting the Uncertainty

Importantly, the memory of the “old,” the adaptation to existing knowledge, the combination of ideas from previous experiences and the imagination of the new possibilities, are together parts of a broad cyclical system that is creativity. We can never have enough creativity as it is an essential human being condition for our existence in a world that is both natural and human-made. It is a biological, psychological, and social human trait that gives us the breath of any desire to change something usual or develop something new.

According to Vygotsky (2004), there are two types of human activity: reproductive activity and combinatorial or creative activity. The former is based on reproducing already known behavioral patterns, which basically relies on the repetition of our previous experiences and the retrieval of earlier impressions. The latter also relies on our acquired experiences but

combines the elements from them to generate new behavior. Both types of socio-cognitive function are equally important because reproductive activity provides us with the necessary knowledge for adaptation in the world, whereas creative activity formulates new actions and new behaviors. The most exciting aspect of this combination of ideas for me is that it is socially and culturally mediated. One's previous experiences are at the same time individual and collective, and what may emerge in the future from this dialogue brings together the already-known and the imagined, holding them in uncertainty.

Taking this into account, it is possible to assert that in order to be creative, teachers must explore beyond sameness, by changing from old patterns that can be useful and comfortable, but that rely on repetition, to the possibility of accepting the unfamiliar, the novel, the uncertain results of L2 language learning experiences. In real-time classroom discussions, it can be challenging for teachers to gauge the relevance of the unpredictable. Fortunately, however, as mentioned above, the novel emerges from previous knowledge that can be explored through dialogue between teachers and students. This naturally introduces some uncertainty into the curriculum, as it is hard to predict where such exploration might go.

According to Beghetto (2013), there are some surprising moments of creative potential that emerge from planned lessons. Take, for example, what might happen when a teacher expects a known answer to their question, but the student responds to it in an unexpected fashion. Beghetto (2009, 2016, 2021) argues that creative openings are not necessarily creative ideas, but potential moments for creativity to happen in educational settings where socio-psychological and material interactions are encountered. He further claims that, the uncertainties that emerge from "in-the-moment" thinking and action in the classroom can serve as a guidance for subsequent choices and actions. They may also echo students' everyday experiences and interactions, where familiar knowledge finds new contexts in which to create fresh combinations. However, if the teacher overlooks this possibility, chances to promote a dialogue in the classroom may be easily missed.

I believe that creative openings can intentionally be planned as part of the class for the students to explore and learn new experiences under any uncertainties. What is more, university teachers can evaluate these creative openings by reflecting in action and reflecting on action with the students. As Schön (1983) explains, *reflection-in-action* involves evaluating one's actions while actively performing a task, enabling individuals to react to unforeseen events by making quick adjustments and revising strategies in the moment. On the other hand, *reflection-on-action* occurs after the action has taken place. It involves a more intentional and structured process of reviewing and analyzing past actions and decisions, with the goal of learning from the experience and exploring alternative strategies for future situations.

From my point of view, creative openings can be opportunities to enhance students' motivation in their language learning processes, considering that not only inside the classroom they can learn to manage their learning goals or set of goals, but also outside the classroom, where they encounter a variety of language communities such as their family, friends, workplaces, peers, etc. University teachers can use both skills to adjust their lessons to the needs of their students and improve their curriculum and teaching methodologies, ensuring that each lesson builds upon the failures and successes of the previous one.

In terms of L2 language experiences, it is worth emphasizing that reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action resonate in the temporal dimension of student motivation because, according to Dörnyei (2000, p. 519) the element of time "[...] is relevant to the study of motivation in at least two crucial areas: to account for (a) how motivation is generated and (b) how it fluctuates and further develops over time." In accordance with this, Runco (2022)

asserts that creativity is a process where one interacts with the environment as s/he moves through time.

Finally, relevant to this story of practice in additional language learning as a CAS, I align my position with Henriksen et al. (2022, p. 114) in recognizing that creativity, uncertainty, and mindfulness meditation coexist. Since such activities involve the manifestation by students of unscripted and unplanned emotions, insights, and ideas, teachers can design classes in which students' problems and understandings are connected to academic goals. Drawing on Beghetto (2021), this may occur when students are given opportunities to define certain elements of the learning creativity process such as choosing the tools they are going to work with to express themselves. I have depicted this in the methodology and discussion and findings section that follow by highlighting the creative openings that emerged during the meditation-based activity. I narrate this from a reflection-on-action perspective, emphasizing the moments when I let go of control. In doing so, I realized that the student was carrying the weight of his academic life, which had become emotionally overwhelming.

Methodology

This section presents the context of this story of practice, the participant, and the data collection procedures. This involved a two-part meditation-based activity that I taught in 2023 in my teaching internship as a PhD student in the TEFL Program at the School of Modern Foreign Languages (FALEM) at UFPA during the Applied Linguistics course.

The Context

I was in charge of teaching the topics "Language Learning as a Complex Adaptive System" (Part 1) and "Motivation" (Part 2) in the Applied Linguistics course at the School of Modern Foreign Languages (FALEM) at UFPA. I decided to cover each on separate days. On the first day, I encouraged creative openings in the class by letting the students revisit their English learning trajectories and then share their reflections, which could be perceived either as challenges to be overcome or threats to be avoided. Regardless of which scenario emerged during the sharing moment, I—as a teacher—was expected to give the students tools for them to explore their creative skills and find the learning goals which would increase motivation and enable them to perceive well-being in the language learning process.

In Part 1, the class explored the concept of language learning process as a Complex Adaptive System by discussing its characteristics of being non-linear, unpredictable, open, adaptive, and dynamic. We emphasized how interactions among agents (parents, teachers, students, peers, etc.) and different elements (objects, culture, emotions, social rules, etc.) shape our ability to think and act in the target language, while simultaneously influencing each other (Paiva, 2013). I then asked the students to reflect on their language learning journeys holistically, emphasizing relationships and processes over static structure. At this moment, I understood they needed to freely create a visual representation, such as a drawing or diagram to illustrate that.

In Part 2, I shifted the focus of the class to "Motivation." I began with a discussion of the concept, tracing its evolution within the field of language learning, and looking at it through the different perspectives related to it (social-psychological, cognitive, self and identity-based, sociodynamic). Grounded in Dörnyei's L2MSS theory (2005) and inspired by the idea of students envisioning different self-images, I introduced the students to the possible-self concept, including the actual self that was the "starting point" for the meditation exercise. Afterwards, I required them to draw a four-column chart on

paper, laptop, or cellphone and write about themselves in the following categories: the actual L2 Self, the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and L2 language learning experiences, respectively. Next, I instructed them to spend a few minutes getting focused on each column as soft music played in the background. I also asked them to move back and forward on the actual self while reflecting on the possible selves and their L2 learning experiences in the chart. Finally, the class was encouraged to close their eyes, breathe in and out, and visualize multiple versions of themselves, attending to their thoughts and feelings as they arose in the moment. At the sound of a bell, they opened their eyes and recorded the scenarios emerging in their minds.

The Participant

The participant in this research, Fred (pseudonym), had enrolled in the School of Foreign Modern Languages at UFPA in the second semester of 2021 at the age of 29. He was one of the students in the 2023 class, and I purposely invited him to participate in this study because I was impressed by the fact that he learned English on his own during the social isolation of COVID-19 pandemic, showing how autonomous and motivated he had been in his language learning journey. Fred was also learning Spanish and French.

Data Collection Procedures

To analyze the data, I used Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis, a method widely applied in social and human sciences research. I chose this approach because it focuses on making meaning from data through six steps: (1) becoming familiar with the data and identifying items of potential interest; (2) generating codes; (3) generating initial themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. In my study, Fred was invited to write two learning narratives, one for each class. I then applied the six steps to both texts, which I refer to as *Narrative 1* and *Narrative 2* throughout this story.

I immersed myself in the narratives to identify meaningful features related to well-being and motivation in language learning. First, I identified initial codes to label key aspects such as lack of passion, changes, becoming/transformation, and risk-taking. Then, I grouped them to form broader patterns, resulting in overarching themes. Each theme was reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the narratives. In doing so, I identified three main themes: (a) reflections followed by a perspective changing; (b) beliefs the individual should hold to prevent negative outcomes or achieve positive outcomes; and (c) the importance of creating a conducive learning environment. These were analysed through the *reflection-on-action* perspective (Schön, 1983), which means that the analysis focused on Fred's reflections after the meditation-based activity.

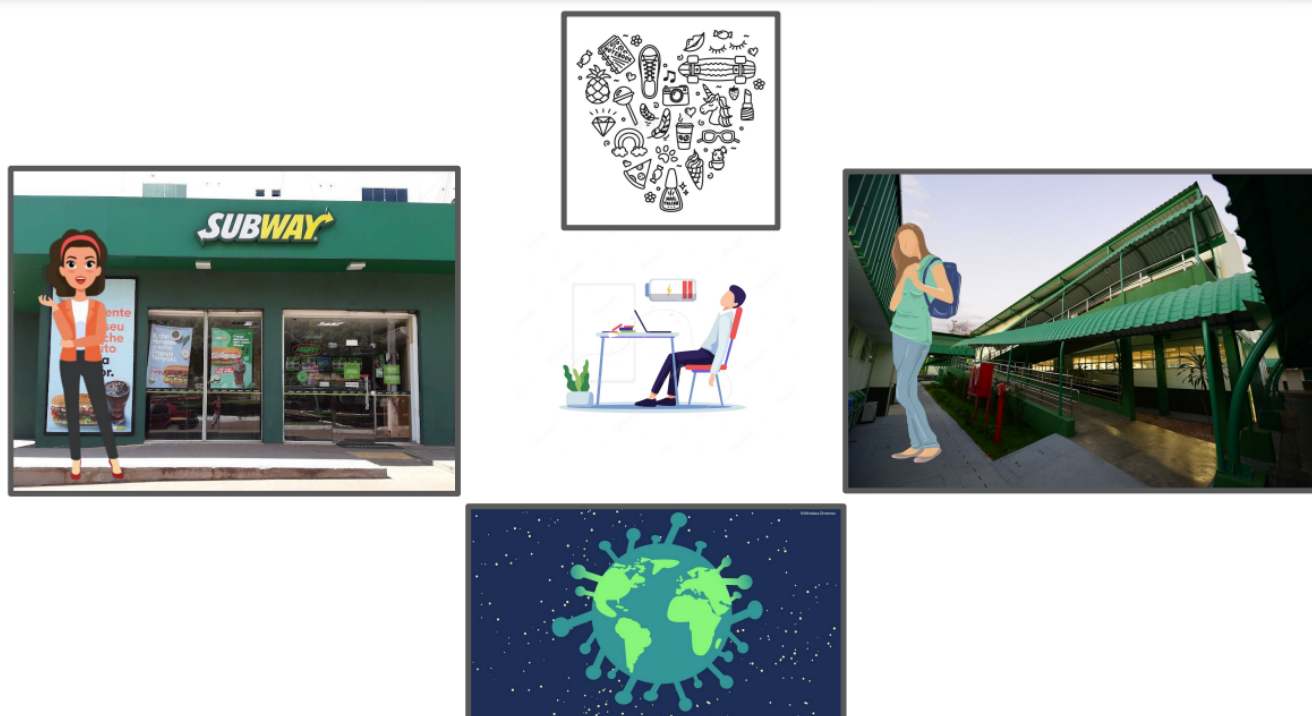
Discussion and Findings: Another Story, Another Student's Point of View

In this section, I explore the discussion and findings from the data analysis, focusing on the collage that Fred created in Part 1 and the chart in Part 2 of the meditation-based activity, which illustrate the *reflection-in-action* aspect. I also discuss the two narratives he wrote after classes, indicating some reflections on action that express that L2 learning experience. I emphasize that these four tools were interpreted together and intertwined throughout the analysis.

Fred's Creative Skills Through Tools

To illustrate his language learning journey, in Part 1 Fred opted to create a collage. Through this visual representation, he sought to illustrate that his language learning was influenced by numerous factors beyond the linguistic domain as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Fred's Visualization of His Language Trajectory



His collage depicts a situation that resulted from meeting an old friend by chance whom he chatted with at the entrance of a fast-food restaurant. Fred reported this in this way:

I remember that this friend spoke so passionately about the undergraduate biology program she was enrolled in that it drove me to reflect on the fact that I had never felt such a beautiful emotion like that towards any profession or field of studies. It was the starting point of a series of events which resulted in me now living in the capital of Pará and studying English, Spanish, and French so passionately and so hard to pursue that strong desire of becoming a good language teacher. (Fred's Narrative 1, 2023).

Concerning this situation, Dörnyei (2019, p. 20) asserts that the interest of the field of the L2MSS theory is "[...] trying to understand what energizes learners to initiate and then sustain the long journey of mastering a foreign/second language." Based on this, I argue that Fred's encounter with his colleague marked the beginning of his language journey and can be considered an example of an L2 learning experience.

My learning language journey began in a very different way, influenced not only by one single element but by various small elements that, in fact, did not have to do exactly with languages and resulted in big changes that led me into this language learning universe. That example illustrates how language learning can be seen through the lenses of Complexity in SLA, once it goes beyond examining the phenomenon of language learning as something isolated. It provides a wider view that considers the

influence of other elements, such as beliefs, emotions, identity, context, autonomy, culture, and so on in the language learning process. (Fred's Narrative 1, 2023).

In the context of complex adaptive systems, narratives are crucial in making a retrospective of the past for understanding how systems adapt and evolve. Fred looked back on his own story, reflecting on how language learning is so complex in that various agents and elements interweave to influence the process, demonstrating its systemic nature. Also, through the meditative activity, he was able to perceive his language learning process by remembering that experience: "Participating in that meditation process helped me (to) relax and reach an overview of what was happening and what I was doing. I could unwind and step away from the chaotic world I was in. Despite the short duration, it brought some calm to my mind" (Fred's Narrative 2, 2023).

In Part 2 of the activity, Fred created a chart that presented his L2 selves and served as a kind of list of the activities that he might consider mandatory to enhance his language skills (e.g., applying to a proficiency test, using apps) as a schema for him to elaborate his visions. Table 1 below illustrates Fred's notes.

Table 1. Fred's L2 selves

Actual L2 Self	Ideal L2 Self	Ought-To L2 Self	L2 Learning Experiences
Can communicate Can talk to anyone Can express myself Can give presentations	More confident More academic More fluid	Study to TOEFL Take more risks Use apps to talk	Conversation course TANDEM Studying to TOEFL

In the "Actual L2 Self" column, Fred recognizes his current abilities, such as being able to communicate, express himself, and give presentations in English. His "Ideal L2 Self" reflects his aspirations to become more confident, academic, and fluent, aiming to talk to anyone with ease. The "Ought-to L2 Self" highlights the actions he believes he should take to meet external expectations and personal responsibilities, such as studying for the TOEFL exam, taking more risks, and using language apps for speaking practice.

Finally, the "L2 Learning Experiences" column lists his ongoing efforts to improve, including participating in conversation courses, engaging in TANDEM language exchanges, and continuing his TOEFL preparation. From my point of view, it is important to highlight that connecting with people is also a significant aspect of the L2 learning experiences. For instance, when he encountered his colleague on the street and saw her happiness with her career, it prompted him to reflect on his own academic path. This experience led him to reconsider his studies and brought about certain turning points in his journey. I understand that these elements together provide a comprehensive view of how Fred perceives his current status, future goals, perceived obligations, and practical learning activities.

As a PhD student in charge of teaching those young adults, I felt delighted that Fred engaged in self-reflection and perspective-shifting during the meditation-based activity. I noticed that he was deeply engaged and motivated with his own language learning process. I demonstrate these aspects in Table 2 below, in which I explore the themes that emerged from the two narratives, highlighting aspects of well-being and motivation during these creative experiences. To support each theme, I have included in the table selected illustrative quotes from Fred's narratives of learning.

Table 2. *Emerging themes from both narratives*

Themes	Fred's Reflection on Action	
1. Reflections followed by a perspective changing	I strongly believe that Complexity Theory can capture and explain my journey so far very well, demonstrating that the small event of talking to a friend led me to question my views on learning and career, disturbing a system very solid, which aroused bigger changes, with the introduction of new elements (Narrative 1)	In a student's life, it's easy to get lost in the daily life without much reflection, especially when managing family, work, and studies. Reflection is crucial to understand our desires, identifying what we are doing right or wrong, and adjusting our decisions correctly. (Narrative 2)
2. Beliefs the individual should hold to prevent negative outcomes or achieve positive outcomes	If it was not for a very complicated situation I had to deal with at work that day in January, I would not have left my workplace later, and I would not probably have met by chance a past friend at the entrance of a Subway fast-food restaurant. We walked some places in town and talked a lot. (Narrative 1)	I was conscious that some developments were needed as I didn't want to be just an ordinary speaker but rather a teacher. To achieve that, I had to study the language formally, aiming for fluency in academic English and overall language proficiency. I wanted to express myself more naturally, struggling less. (Narrative 2)
3. The importance of creating a conducive learning environment	The activity helped me take more risks and explore additional alternatives for studying and developing my language skills. It made me realize that I was too busy and needed to find more time to invest in my language studies. (Narrative 2)	This semester, I am determined to dedicate more time to language studies, take it easy, and invest more time and energy in learning languages (English, Spanish, and French). I love studying languages, it brings me joy, that is the reason that brought me here to this point of my life. The meditation activity definitely helped me achieve this level of awareness. (Narrative 2)

The thematic analysis characteristic of being detached from a specific theory allowed me to intertwine theories, as can be seen in this story of practice. In addition, I could have some flexibility in interpreting and reflecting on the themes in a creative and engaging way as I moved backwards and forwards in the analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), thematic analysis is not a linear approach but a recursive process in seeking to understand the participant's subjective experience.

For me, an interesting aspect of Fred's attitude is how he drives his reflections to a perspective-changing position. After revisiting some emotions from the past as well as desired projects and aspirations in the future, the learner elaborates self-images of himself that motivate him to change behavior and evaluate consequences. This is related to the "conditions necessary for self-images to energize motivation" (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 92), which Fred demonstrates throughout his narratives. Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) assert that a desired future self-image must be:

- a. *available*: Fred seems to have a clear understanding of his ideal and ought-to self-guides as he communicates his desires. He also identifies what he is doing “right or wrong.”
- b. *differ from the current self*: Fred questions his own views of learning and career in order to put some efforts to realize his aspirations.
- c. *elaborate and vivid*: Fred details his future images in a way to explore additional alternatives for studying and developing language skills.
- d. *plausible*: By understanding his limitations and potentials, Fred is able to take more risks on his language learning process.
- e. *in harmony with the learner's social environment*: Fred's ideal and ought-to selves seem to be balanced in the purpose of his language learning development. It motivates him to become someone who is “part of the global community.”
- f. *effort-demanding*: Fred acknowledges that he was in need of finding more time to invest in his language studies.
- g. *be regularly activated in the learner's working*: Fred affirms that in order to be an English teacher, he needs to constantly study the language, aiming for proficiency.
- h. *accompanied by relevant and effective procedural strategies*: Fred mentions some strategies to learn the language such as using apps, studying for proficiency tests, seeking opportunities to speak in English.
- i. *offset by a counteracting feared possible self in the same domain*: Fred remembers how “tired out, stressed, and extremely busy” he was in that semester at the university, but, by participating in the meditation class, he “could unwind and step away” from the problems and become calm.

Fred reflected on how envisioning self-images gave him an overview of his learning process and studies. He could reflect on his desires, decisions, and ways to stay committed to language learning goals. It brought more of Fred to the practice as the visions of himself conveyed images “[...] that the learner will then internalize to some extent” (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 88). I believe that it has become imperative to give room for students to be able to feel confidence and encouragement in higher education, so, the meditation-based activity was meant to be a practice for the student to self-regulate feelings and stay mentally open to positive thoughts as Fred affirms in Narrative 2:

I understood the importance of self-empathy, acknowledging that I was going through a tough time, and it was okay not to perform as well as I would in a more conducive environment for language studies. Nonetheless, I was proud of my achievements. (Fred's Narrative 2, 2023).

Another positive benefit that I considered was the enhancement of his sense of agency, because he believes that the more effort he puts in his learning process the more feasible and positive the outcomes might be. In accordance with Oxford (2018) and Sulis et al. (2022), being agentic empowers learners to make changes and nurture their well-being system as well as they learn from their experience and from the influences of the environment in a self-organizing movement.

The environment is another important aspect that can engage a student's emotions through the sense of belonging. Since creating a conducive learning environment is related to the learner's present experiences, their inclination to learn fluctuates based on their degree of integration within a community of practice (Fukada et al., 2022). According to Pavlenko & Norton (2007) and Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), belonging to a community also requires the learner's imagination, where their desires are able to expand and reach out to wider worlds. From my personal view, when Fred imagined himself as part of a community of practice

and envisioned moments of sudden realization, he could find the well-being necessary to sustain his motivation to keep learning. For instance, in Narrative 2, Fred highlighted his identity and abilities, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

I knew I could communicate, interact with others in English, share my ideas, and express myself. I wanted to become someone who was part of the global community and I knew I could achieve it. I was conscious that some developments were needed as I didn't want to be just an ordinary speaker but rather a teacher. (Fred's Narrative 2, 2023).

I did not mention this before, but at the end of Part 2 of the meditation-based activity, I read to the class a poem that I had written specially for the students. It talked about my own learning process while teaching them for the very first time at the university. To my surprise, a few weeks later, Fred and I ran into each other in the street and he told me he had started rewriting poems after my class. This lets me affirm that the meditation-based activity was a strategy to explore the creative openings in and beyond the classroom.

I am proud that the whole activity seemed all creativity-encouraging, including the discussion and material interactions (the chart, the collage, the meditation experience, the bell, etc.). This is an important part of enabling creativity—representing their language learning through another medium. The uncertainties that arose “in the moment” through the creative openings and are then reflected on served as a form of guidance for students’ future decisions and actions.

Concluding Thoughts

Even though we could not predict what would emerge from Fred's L2 experience, we can say that the uncertainties that emerged from the meditation-based activity were aligned with the student's learning goals. By creating visions of successful possible selves, Fred perceived well-being as part of his language learning process. The learner showed kindness with his language learning process, managed stress, reflected about feelings and emotions, drove his reflections to a perspective-changing position, self-regulated his feelings, nurtured positive thoughts, enhanced his sense of agency, and developed a sense of belonging.

It would be necessary to undertake a longitudinal research study to measure how much of these aspects deeply reached Fred, but from a short-term perspective, his “here-and-now self” was motivated, because he expressed some desires for change, demonstrating his motivation for his language journey. In the meantime, Fred believes he can continue creating visions of himself and of his future to plan long-term progression.

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Review Process

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Ana Paula Cruz é educadora há mais de 15 anos, apaixonada por estudar sobre aprendizagem de línguas, criatividade, formação de professores, gestão e inovação. Atualmente, ela faz doutorado no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras (PPGL) pela Universidade Federal do Pará, e finalizou um estágio doutoral pela CAPES na Dublin City University na Irlanda. Ana Paula é comunicativa, empática, criativa e gosta de levar essas habilidades para sua pesquisa, palestras e workshops.

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Playing With Theory to Explore Social Language Learning in an Autonomy-Promoting English Course

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This story of practice outlines a practitioner-research project exploring the concept of social language learning on an autonomy-promoting English course at the University of Helsinki Language Centre. Students on the Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS) course are required to include a social element into their self-devised plan for the course. The project puzzles about social language learning in two distinct stages: stage 1 inquires how students understand social language learning and stage 2 explores how social language learning manifests on the course through the author's language counselling journal. In both stages, a thematic analysis approach is used to make sense of the data. The first stage problematises the concept of social language learning by revealing a wide range of responses to and understandings of the term, including positioning it variously as speaking practice, group work, learning by doing, supportive, fun, difficult, and central to the learning process. The second stage of the inquiry approaches social language learning from the perspective of actor-network theory, which is critical of pre-determined categories such as social, preferring instead to explore phenomena by tracing the association or interactions between the various actors in a network. The study is conceived of as a playful exploration of the author's own educational practices in relation to the social dimensions in language learning. It has resulted in new approaches to thinking about the course, particularly in relation to the course's skills support groups. Analysis of the data also provides insight into the students' language practices, especially in relation to texts, and their approaches to realising autonomy in language learning.

Tämä teksti kuvaa käytännönläheistä tutkimusprojektia, jossa tutkittiin sosiaalisen kielenoppimisen käsitettä autonomiaan kannustavalla englannin kurssilla Helsingin yliopiston kielikeskuksessa. Autonomisen oppimisen moduuleissa (ALMS:ssa) opiskelijoiden tulee sisällyttää sosiaalinen elementti itse suunnittelemaansa kurssisuunnitelmaan. Tämä projekti tarkasteli sosiaalista kielenoppimista kahdessa eri vaiheessa: ensimmäisessä vaiheessa selvitettiin, miten opiskelijat ymmärtävät sosiaalisen kielenoppimisen, ja toisessa tutkittiin, miten sosiaalinen kielenoppiminen tulee esiin kirjoittamassani kielenohjauspäiväkirjassa. Molemmissa vaiheissa käytettiin temaattista analyysimenetelmää aineiston tulkinnessa. Ensimmäinen vaihe kyseenalaisti itse sosiaalisen kielenoppimisen käsitteen. Tämä nousi esiin laajana kirjona erilaisia vastauksia ja eriäviä tulkintoja opiskelijoille annetuissa reflektio-harjoituksessa. Sosiaalinen kielenoppiminen asemoitiin muun muassa puhumisen harjoitteluksi, ryhmätyöksi, tekemällä oppimiseksi, hauskaksi, vaikeaksi ja keskeiseksi osaksi oppimisprosessia. Tutkimuksen toinen vaihe lähestyi sosiaalista kielenoppimista toimijaverkostoteorian (actor-network theory) näkökulmasta. Tämä teoria suhtautuu kriittisesti ennalta määriteltuihin kategorioihin, kuten "sosiaalinen", ja tarkastelee ilmiötä jäljittämällä vuorovaikutuksia eri toimijoiden välisissä verkostossa. Tämä eksploratiivinen tutkimus sai alkunsa kirjoittajan omista pedagogisista käytännöistä suhteessa sosiaaliin kokemuksiin kielenoppimisessa. Tutkimusmatkani on johtanut uusiin tapoihin ajatella ALMS-kurssia, erityisesti kurssin taitotukiryhmien osalta. Aineiston analyysi tarjoaa myös näkökulmia opiskelijoiden kielikäytänteisiin, erityisesti tekstien suhteen, sekä heidän tapoihinsa toteuttaa autonomiaa kielenoppimisessaan.

Keywords

learner autonomy, practitioner research, social language learning, actor-network theory
oppijan autonomia, käytännönläheinen tutkimus, sosiaalinen kielenoppiminen, toimijaverkostoteoria

This story of practice begins with a puzzle about social language learning in a university English course which promotes learner autonomy. The Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS) course at the University of Helsinki Language Centre in Finland is a course where students plan, carry out, and evaluate a programme of language learning work (Holec,

1981) to complete their foreign-language degree requirement. One of the few course requirements is that students incorporate a social element into their language learning work. This social element could involve joining one of the many skills support groups the ALMS team runs to help students complete their course and develop their language skills. It could also refer to DIY groups established by students to meet their own needs or other activities students plan where they communicate or interact in English.

As a teacher and language counsellor on the course, I understand the requirement for students to include a social element to their language learning. It encourages students to add diversity and variety into their work on the course and aims to ensure they use the language in communicative and interactive settings. As a practitioner researcher influenced by the Exploratory Practice (EP) approach (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), on the other hand, I find the idea of social language learning somewhat puzzling. Firstly, social language learning is not a clearly defined concept or an easily identifiable behaviour (see, for example, Firth & Wagner, 1997, 2007). It also reveals something of my ALMS colleagues' and my values about language learning. For example, it indicates that we consider autonomous language learning as more than independent reading or self-study grammar exercises. It is also not clear how students understand, react, and respond to the idea of social language learning and the requirement to include it in their course. Thus, the *social* in language learning became a puzzle for me as a counsellor-researcher.

In this story of practice, I recount my exploration of the idea of the social in this autonomous language learning environment, both with my students on the course and for my own theoretical and pedagogical understanding as a counsellor. I first present the educational context, the ALMS course at the University of Helsinki Language Centre, and discuss my own approach to practitioner research within this environment.

I then outline a two-stage project, exploring the concept of social language learning with my students. In the first stage, students were asked at the beginning of an ALMS course to reflect on what social language learning meant to them. This task resulted in a database of 74 responses, which were thematically analysed to explore the variety of understandings of the term social learning.

The second stage of the project was conducted via my counselling journal and using the lens of actor-network theory (ANT) to reflect on the social in my students' learning journeys. The data here comprised journal entries based on counselling sessions with 34 students who were completing their ALMS course.

The story of practice concludes with my reflection on the implications of this inquiry for my practice and my pedagogical literacy and thinking. I suggest that critically reflective and reflexive practitioner research—particularly within the EP framework—can deepen our understanding of learning and learner autonomy and help us better support students in pursuing them.

Educational Context

The ALMS course at the University of Helsinki Language Centre is an English course, and one of the many options students have for fulfilling their foreign-language degree requirement (Suomen Säädoskokoelma/Finnish Statute Book, 2004, art. 1, § 6). English is widely used in Finnish society and forms an important part of many degree programmes in the country's third level institutions. Even if a degree programme is nominally Finnish or Swedish-medium, students are frequently required to read textbooks and original research in English and work in English with international faculty and exchange students. Thus, many—though by

no means all—Finnish university students are proficient users of English and can be seen as what Kramsch (2009) terms *multilingual subjects*. For a fuller discussion of the role of English in Finnish higher education, see for example, Laitinen et al. (2023, pp. 52-59) or Renfors (2021).

Running since 1994, the ALMS course promotes learner autonomy: that students should take charge of their own learning and be actively involved in the planning, carrying out and evaluation of their own work on the course (Holec, 1981). In the two group opening sessions, students are introduced to the idea of autonomy and reflect on themselves as language learners and users, including their language learner histories and their needs and goals for the future. After these sessions, the students plan their course, which consists of approximately 100 hours of study, recorded and reflected on in a language learning diary, log or blog. The exact method of recording and reflecting on learning is chosen by the individual students, who are offered models such as those presented in Dam (2009) or Mlynarczyk (2006). The main pedagogical support for students occurs through one-to-one language counselling sessions (see also language *advising*, Mynard & Carson, 2012) at the beginning, middle, and end of the course. Here students reflect with their counsellor on their plan and their progress throughout the course.

Counselling is the principal tool in the course's pedagogy for autonomy (Karlsson et al., 2007). The three counselling sessions during the course act as important markers for the students as it is here students verbalise their ideas about, plans for, and experiences of learning (Bradley & Karlsson, 2017). Counselling is also a space for intentional reflective dialogue (Kato & Mynard, 2015), where students find encouragement and validation and face questions and challenges from their counsellor. The counsellors on the ALMS course are also English teachers at the Language Centre and bring their pedagogical expertise to their work as counsellors. However, counselling often involves holding back one's teaching expertise and instead, by listening and asking questions, encouraging and supporting the student to take charge of their own language learning.

The ALMS course, and counselling in particular, has been an active site of practitioner research (PR) since its inception (Karlsson et al., 1997) with counsellors encouraged to take active roles in producing educational knowledge and engaging in a "scholarship of counselling" (Karlsson, 2015; see also Vieira, 2010). My own inquiry is thus shaped by this culture and tradition of PR, which focuses on exploring the local but also contributing to wider discussions in the fields of language counselling, learner autonomy, and additional language learning.

The ALMS counsellors/teachers also run a series of skills support groups during the semester-long course, where students can practice particular skills, as well as receive input, support, and feedback. (For a fuller discussion of the support group system in ALMS, see Bradley et al., 2023.) The groups are generally small, informal groups of students working together with the support of a teacher on skills such as academic writing, conversation, or giving presentations. We run roughly 35 of these groups each semester with a range of in-class and online groups, both synchronous and asynchronous. Students are generally required to take at least one of these groups as part of their coursework, and this requirement has traditionally overlapped with the requirement to include a social element in their course. This reveals an assumption that our support groups are by default social learning experiences and also a desire for them to be social learning spaces or learning experiences in the traditions of social constructivist ideas of learning in general and in the learner autonomy literature in particular (see, for example, Murray, 2014; Mynard et al., 2020).

Stage 1: What Does Social Language Learning Mean to ALMS Students?

To explore the puzzle of why students are required to include a social element in their course, I drew on the Exploratory Practice (EP) method of using a Potentially Exploitable Pedagogical Activity (PEPA; see Hanks, 2017). A PEPA is an activity that functions both as a classroom activity and an opportunity to explore one's particular puzzle, in other words to conduct classroom research. Generating data during normal pedagogical activity follows the EP principle of integrating research into practice, not making it something extra, imposed on students or teachers.

In this project, the PEPA was a reflective writing task, where students were asked to free write for several minutes before discussing in small groups. Free writing (Elbow, 1989) before discussion is a task used several times in the ALMS opening sessions, both to afford students time to develop their ideas before discussing them with peers, and to introduce the practice of reflective writing as part of taking charge of one's learning. This free writing task took place during the second opening session of the course, where students had a little knowledge of the course ahead, but before they had made a detailed plan for the course.

The students were asked, "What does social language learning mean to you?" as well as a follow-up question about how they would include a social element in their ALMS course. They were given the choice to write on paper or anonymously in an e-form, with only the latter being saved for use in this study. At this stage, students were also briefly introduced to this inquiry into the social in language learning and invited to participate by sharing their reflections. Those who did choose the e-form option were also free to leave their answers unsubmitted if they so wished. As well as the two groups I was leading, two of my colleagues offered their groups the option to share their answers via the e-form. Thus, five groups of the 11 groups starting that autumn participated. The other six groups did similar activities to introduce the idea of learning socially in the course and our support group system.

In total, 74 students shared their reflections on social language learning. This sample was not intended to be representative of the whole student body but was intended rather to open a discussion about the social aspect of language learning, which the students would continue in groups during the opening sessions and with their counsellor as the course progressed. For my project, it was a chance to sample the kinds of understandings and beliefs students might bring to the idea of social language learning and to explore what might be similar or different to my own understandings. I was keen to hear different voices and not searching for a correct or definitive answer. Table 1 below provides a brief overview of the data used in this stage of the inquiry.

Table 1. Overview of Data in Stage 1

Question/prompt	What does social learning mean to you?
Number of respondents	74 students
Means of data collection	MS Forms
Data collected (time)	September 2019
Data collected (place)	In class
Data collected (time in course)	2 nd opening session (Week 2 of course)

To analyse the responses, I followed a process guided by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). After multiple readings to familiarise myself with the data, I began coding the responses. I initially used a semantic approach, adhering closely to the students'

own words when developing the codes, and subsequently I also added latent codes which appeared relevant. My aim here was to keep the coding process open and to be cautious with interpretations. The process resulted in 35 codes, with almost all responses receiving multiple codes and some up to eight. Following the coding, I made connections between the codes, grouping similar codes, while trying to also preserve subtle differences. This process resulted in five main themes, which I summarise here supported by extracts from the student responses.

Analysis of the Student Responses

The first theme identified in the responses was that social learning involves *speaking*, *communication*, and *interaction*. This idea featured in over half the responses, both in short simple answers where social language learning was defined as “conversation with other people” [Response 2] to responses where this was expanded on, such as

[Social learning means]...having conversations with people around you. You learn almost every time something new fro[m] other people and you can teach or tell something new to them as well... [Response 14]

There is an emphasis here on learning emerging from interactions, and that these interactions can cause or at least create the conditions for learning. Another student noted the different types of interactions afford different learning opportunities:

[Social learning means]... you speak in a different way in different social situations. For example I would speak more freely and with slang to a friend in my age but to a teacher I would put more effort in my speaking. [Response 68]

The speaking practice is seen as important, but the situation and relationships involved are also here seen to offer different learning opportunities. Most students focused exclusively on oral communication in their responses, but a small number also referred to writing as a site of social learning. The following is one example where writing is explicitly positioned as social practice, particularly when a text is shared:

[Social learning means] ...speaking with other people, writing texts and letting other people evaluate them, listening to other people speak. [Response 28]

The second theme generated from the responses was that of *sharing* or *exchanging*. In addition to sharing situations and texts, as mentioned in the previous extracts, sharing is also explicitly associated with learning in six responses, including sharing thoughts and opinions to directly sharing the learning process, as in sharing progress, strategies, and ideas [for learning]. Related and overlapping ideas here are learning *with* others, learning *from* others, and working in groups.

Social language learning means to me that I can find the courage to learn from others and others can learn from me and the group learns together... [Response 45]

It means working together with other students. Maybe by participating in many support groups or otherwise being active and arranging your own study groups. [Response 47]

Interacting and communicating with both students and teachers. Learning together with other students and learning skills and techniques from other students. Getting to see glimpses from somebody else’s view on things. [Response 50]

The third theme from the responses was the idea of social language learning as a way or method of learning languages. This could be seen from responses coded as *learning by doing* or *learning in authentic contexts*.

It's about learning by using a language to communicate. [Response 72]

Social language learning was often also contrasted with other forms of learning, specifically learning from books and studying grammar. In the following example responses, social language learning...

...means possibility to study English in way, that differs from classic learning ways. It involves interaction between other people in many contexts. [Response 43]

[...is b]etter and maybe more longlasting than reading from a book. [Response 42]

[...d]oesn't focus as much on for example correct grammar, but more on getting more and more comfortable with learning and speaking a language. [Response 37]

But a similar number of students emphasised the centrality of social language learning. Rather than being *a* way of learning, social language learning was *the* way to learn languages:

It's the base for everything else really, since if the language is only written words, it might be intriguing and wonderful but it's not alive. I think speaking, as in thinking of a response and listening, is the core of any language. Social language learning is also the quickest and most motivating way to learn. [Response 73]

The fourth theme revolves around particular adjectives that were associated with the idea of social language learning. One was the idea that social language learning was important. This can be seen of course in the previous extract (*it's the base for everything else really*) and the word *important* is directly used by the students several times. As well as importance, the adjectives *fun* and *nice* are also invoked frequently.

Social learning to me means usually that I can learn new things while doing something fun... [Response 41]

In contrast to this positive attitude toward social language learning, there is also a group of students who feel social language learning is *difficult* or *hard work*. For many of these, however, the difficulty is also connected to the importance and the responses do not suggest these students planned to avoid social language learning because it was difficult.

It's a little difficult for me because I'm not too confident speaking English. It's easier to study alone then. But it's my goal now to have more courage in this matter. [Response 8]

The final theme I identified was that social language learning social language learning is often associated with identity. In some responses, the students describe themselves as social beings so it followed that their language learning should also be social. Others explicitly did not identify with the idea of social language learning, which contributed to the difficulty of learning the language.

...I think it's nice to learn together because I'm social and I like to speak with others. [Response 12]

What struck me most about the students' responses was their diversity. While oral skills and communicative activities seemed to be the most prevalent in the responses, their answers

touched on a whole range of activities from group learning, to input from diverse interlocutors in varying contexts, giving and receiving feedback, learning with and from others, as well as learning by teaching. Social language learning was referred to in connection with both classroom activities and authentic real-world activities. It was also referred to at various stages of the learning process, such as in relation to input, practice, and feedback, as well as finding motivation, moral support and meta-learning techniques. Although speaking is seen as central, writing and even “just reading together silently” [Response 59] were also seen as social language learning activities.

While the diversity in response is both inspiring and encouraging, showing our learners to be active thoughtful participants in their own learning process—one of the goals of a course promoting learner autonomy—it does also raise the question of how our requirement to include social language learning is understood by students. The term social language learning certainly has meaning and resonance for the students, but it is also understood differently and provokes sometimes strikingly different reactions among them.

Stage 2: Social Language Learning in Counselling Through the Lens of Actor Network Theory (Ant)

To develop the initial inquiry, I recorded and reflected on how social learning materialised in my students’ courses over the next few semesters. I did this by writing in a counselling journal, updating it after each counselling session or group of counselling sessions. A section of this counselling journal forms the data for Stage 2 of this story of practice, where I explore social in language learning in the ALMS course through the theoretical lens of actor-network theory (see, for example, Latour, 2005). I first introduce the counselling journal as a tool for continuing professional development and a method of practitioner research. I then present the specific section of the journal which forms the basis for this story of practice. Following this, I outline how and why actor-network theory came to be used as a lens for this stage of the project. The story of practice concludes with analysis and discussion of the counselling journal, as well as some implications and limitations of the inquiry.

My counselling journal is both a tool for professional development and a research instrument. As a record of and a reflection on the counselling sessions, the journal generates data and is also a first step in the analysis process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I take a free writing approach (Elbow, 1989), not aiming at a text designed for other readers, but rather attempting to engage myself in a dialogue with my counselling experiences and with my reading of literature in and around the field of language education, a dialogue between theory and practice. The journal can be seen as a form of reflective practice (Farrell, 2015; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Schön, 1983), critically reflecting on the counselling encounters, and a form of autoethnography (Bochner, 2012; Canagarajah, 2012; Pinner, 2018) or autoethnographic field notes from the counselling sessions. The approach is influenced by the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP) (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, pp. 149-155) in that it integrates research into pedagogical practice and mirrors the reflective writing that students do in the opening sessions of their ALMS course and in their logs, blogs, or diaries throughout the course.

For this stage of the study, I focus on the journal entries from the final counselling meetings in spring 2023. I chose the final counselling session as this is where students recount and reflect on how the learning happened during the course. The data for this stage of the story were thus generated during April and May in 2023, based on 34 counselling sessions with 34 students spread over 12 days. The resulting journal was an 8-page Google doc containing 4,425 words.

My writing in these journal entries considers the final counselling sessions through the lens of actor-network theory. The following is an entry from my journal showing how I arrived at this theoretical lens. The entry is dated (Journal, 7.3.23), showing that it was written before the final counselling sessions in April and May of the same year. It demonstrates how my reading around the idea of social learning influenced and shaped my reflections on the students' learning practices.

I'm coming back to Latour [2005] after a while of not reading and it's interesting mostly as a lens to reflect my own thinking and approach. In *Reassembling the Social* (esp. Chap 2) he's talking about how sociologists of the social can be forcing the actors into certain pre-existing categories. I feel I could be guilty of that here even as I am trying to get away from it... I think I'll focus on it especially on the final counselling. (Journal, 7.3.23)

Latour's *pre-existing categories* refer to the idea of labelling things as social or not social, before examining them and deciding how the various human and non-human actors interact to form networks. My own feeling of guilt refers to my attempt to *identify* social learning in the students' practices. Here the journal shows me finding a theoretical hook to hang my dissatisfaction with the idea of social learning on. Throughout the project, I had found social learning to be both everywhere and also not easy to distinguish from other forms of learning, as something stable and distinct in and of itself. The ANT lens thus offered a way to refocus my inquiry and renew my thinking.

A Brief Introduction to ANT and Its Relevance for This Story of Practice

Actor-Network Theory originates in the late 1970s and the work of social scientists such as John Law, Michael Callon, and Bruno Latour (Latour, 2005). While exact definitions are contested, ANT approaches can be seen as ways to explore and unpick complex phenomena, and they have been widely used in disciplines, such as science and technology, business, healthcare, and indeed education and linguistics. While few ANT-inspired studies focus on language learning directly, Carroll's (2018) case study of the implementation of a Computer Assisted Language Learning curriculum at a university language centre springs from a similar context to my own study. Carroll argues that ANT "[allows and perhaps encourages us] to look beyond the conventional register for ways of telling [a story] so as to reveal what would otherwise remain hidden" (p. 253). This aptly describes my own use of ANT in this story of practice: an approach to use theory creatively in exploring the idea of the social in my students' language learning.

ANT approaches view the world as composed of actors—both human and non-human—acting on and with each other to form networks. In Law's words "entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities" (Law, 1999, p. 3), implying that networks affect and construct actors as much as the other way around. Central to ANT is the idea that pre-existing categorisations should be disregarded or at least distrusted. ANT, thus, rejects an essential difference between human and non-human actors, which is not to say that interacting with a human is the same as interacting with an object. The key point would be instead to examine the actors and how they interact rather than placing them into pre-determined categories like human and non-human. Likewise, the non-human actors are considered essential to the interaction and not merely tools, props, or contexts which support interaction between humans. Indeed, they are seen to act on and influence interactions as much as the people in the network.

While the ANT literature contains a host of concepts and terms, a thorough introduction of them being beyond the scope of this story of practice, two terms struck me as particularly useful for examining my students' language learning: mediators and intermediaries. *Intermediaries* are uncomplicated actors in the network, "transporting meaning or force without transforming it" (Latour, 2005, p. 39). *Mediators* by contrast "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour, 2005, p. 39). Important too is the idea that the boundaries between mediators and intermediaries are not stable. An example here would be the Zoom platform over which most of my counselling practice takes place. In some counselling sessions, it is a simple intermediary facilitating the practice of counsellor and student discussing the course. The software, however, can easily become a mediator in particular circumstances, dramatically affecting the counselling session or a student's learning network. This effect could be positive if it allows students to complete the course remotely or negative if a bad internet connection makes it difficult to talk. This contrast is evident in the journal entries analysed in this study. Writing about one counselling session, I remark:

The counselling changed things - meeting and talking, face to face, allowed me to see the human and the person there and indeed his reflection and not just judge based on my preconceptions. (Day 3 of 12, Johannes [pseudonym])

whereas later that day, in another counselling session, I note:

maybe here it's affected by us not really engaging in the counselling. It feels hard to talk and to remember here and to establish the communication via Zoom. (Day 3 of 12, Lotta [pseudonym])

In the first extract, counselling is the mediator and the fact that it takes place via Zoom seems merely incidental. Indeed, I refer to it as "face-to-face" communication. In the second, however, Zoom has transformed into a mediator, seemingly limiting a discussion between student and counsellor.

From an ANT perspective then, the idea of social learning cannot be accepted as a distinct concept and then looked for and identified in my counselling encounters. As seen from Part 1 of this enquiry, the idea of social learning has multiple meanings and evokes a variety of intellectual and emotional responses. My approach in this part of the story of practice was instead to borrow the ANT idea of *tracing associations* (Latour, 2005) or interactions between things. Thus, I examined the actors in my students' courses: who or what were my students interacting with on the course and in the support groups, and what did their learning networks look like? Which actors seemed to be mediators and which intermediaries of learning? These questions served as research questions guiding my analysis of the journal.

Analysing the Journal

After journaling about the counselling sessions, I analysed the resulting text following a process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). I reread the journal multiple times to familiarise myself with the text, corrected minor spelling and grammar errors and then uploaded it to ATLAS.ti Web (Version 9.18.0) for coding. My coding was an iterative process inspired by abductive coding (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Vila-Henninger et al., 2024), where initial ideas from theory are used to begin the coding process and this is subsequently complemented with ideas from the data. Thus, I started with very broad codes such as *Learning interactions* where I highlighted my writing about students creating or being active within their learning network with other actors. Likewise, I included a code

for *Limited engagement* or *Lack of engagement*, where I noted interactions that did not seem to lead to learning.

I also coded for *Support Group Interactions*, where I wrote about students' learning experiences in support groups. These have traditionally been assumed to be sites of social learning in the ALMS course, so I was interested in who or what students felt they were interacting with in the groups in order to learn. I also added codes based on significant actors in the students' courses, such as *Interacting with texts* or *Effect of counselling*, and further refined the codes based on details from the journal.

Table 2 below shows an overview of the data used in this part of the study. I quote liberally from the data below to illustrate the analysis. The quotes are labelled with the day of the counselling session and pseudonyms have been used in place of students' names. The students were informed of my counselling journal both in the opening sessions of the course and in counselling sessions and granted their permission for it to be used as a research tool with their anonymity assured. Thus, exact dates have been omitted here, and students' actual names are not recorded in the journal.

Table 2. *Overview of Data in Stage 2*

Time period for counselling journal	April & May 2023
Number of days on which I counselled	12 days
Number of students counselled in this period	34 students
Counselling journal (Google Doc)	4,425 words (8 pages)
Qualitative analysis software used	Atlas.ti Web (V9.18.0)

The following sections comprise an analysis and discussion of the journal in relation to my research questions. In contrast to Stage 1 of this story of practice, where I puzzled about how students understood social language learning, the ANT lens focused my attention on the students' interactions on the course. In presenting the analysis, I first address who or what my students interacted with on the course and how these interactions related to their learning. I then outline how the students interacted with the course's support groups, traditionally thought of as being sites of social learning in ALMS. The analysis concludes by examining the mediators and intermediaries on the course, particularly focusing on the students' agency: how they acted and were acted upon in their learning during the course.

Analysis of the Journal 1: Who or What Did the Students Interact With?

My journal reveals many examples of what could be called traditional social learning: speaking, discussion, communication with other people in support groups, DIY groups, and diverse out-of-classroom settings.

Julia* purposely chose shifts at work so she could speak English with more "accomplished" speakers, and she organized events where she would have to speak English... (Day 4 of 12, *All names quoted are pseudonyms)

A group with friends allowed Laura to relax and use the language but the vocab support group challenged her to speak more clearly and correctly and complexly - she had to think about it more. And both of these interactions were important. (Day 7)

However, there were also many non-human actors on the course with which students interacted, most notably texts:

Ella interacted mainly with texts. She read them, reviewed them, translated them, reflected on them, wrote about them, discussed them, summarized them. (Day 1 of 12)

This interacting with texts accords well with the ANT literature: Law and Hetherington (2003) see texts as a key category of materiality, and they are seen in ANT analyses not only to simply carry information, but also to “control, direct, monitor, document, make visible, shape consolidate and inscribe what comes to be valued as knowledge” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 8; see also Farrell, 2006). For many students, the texts themselves shaped and directed the learning, being more mediators of learning rather than mere course materials used to achieve a learning objective.

I had always avoided the hard texts but now Anni went at them and took time to really engage with them. Listening again to a part of an audiobook, reading again, making notes, writing things down. So really conscious engagement, deep engagement rather than just a surface reading - which seemed to give more in terms of really understanding and developing vocab, etc. (Day 2 of 12)

Anni here affords the hard texts a certain presence and respect in her course and interacting with them led to her learning. The quote above highlights the conscious engagement, but there seems also to be a physical engagement with going at the texts, rereading and relistening, and indeed making notes and writing things down. The texts here could thus be said to match well with Law and Hetherington's (2003) other two categories of materiality: material objects and bodies.

One particular text which students engaged with was their course log or diary. However, its role in the course varied greatly from student to student.

...for Onni [the log/diary] was the tool to bring structure, once he found a way to reflect that felt suitable/appropriate for him. He didn't want to write a long confessional page about everything he ever did, but rather more clipped scientific notes and comments. It brings to mind this Latour [2005] idea of mediators and intermediaries. The log is sometimes not so important - just a place to note things down and bring structure, but sometimes it's a place for learning and it itself creates and facilitates the learning. (Day 9)

The logs'/diaries' centrality to the course was especially important in making the learning visible and connecting the diverse activities of the course. I describe one log/diary as “rich and full of different interactions” (Day 7) and another as “really detailed and meticulously kept—again that making the learning visible was really useful for [Matias] in his own words” (Day 4). These linked, networked texts are emblematic of the ANT idea that the actors in a network gain meaning and identity from their relations with each other. The texts themselves are not important as distinct entities but rather in their relations with the students and with other actors on the course.

The interactions between actors are also almost always multiple, meaning there are many actors involved at the same time, and the intensity of the interactions seems to correlate with the intensity of the learning.

Anni also said writing was best when she did summaries—here I think this was because of the mediation element. She had to really think about what she had read and engage with that, whereas the essay was just more performative, something she wrote. This seems to speak to the connectedness again—not just her and the page—and the teacher!—but her and the original text and the page and the connection between reading and writing and then the reader—maybe she was the most important reader here! (Day 2)

The logs/diaries are often particularly central actors due to their being the site of reflection, which is also the case for other reflective aspects of the course, such as the counselling sessions. Reflection appears to allow the student to *trace associations* (Latour, 2005) or make connections between the different elements of the course and thus see their learning. While reflection often involves interaction with oneself, or intra-action, its dialogic, interactive, perhaps one could even say *social*, character is emphasised in my journal, even if the interaction was not always with other human actors. Students reflected by interacting with their logs/diaries, their course goals, their learner identities, and sometimes their counsellor. The following quotes feature some of these reflective interactions, showing how the students interacted with different elements of the course, sometimes employing them as learning tools and sometimes having their learning shaped by them.

Aino also mentioned how interacting with herself and her existing knowledge worked for her - and the previous work built on and led to the later work. "Okay, Now I'm ready for that." The reflection in the log/blog was only one part - in fact more a fun way ("like a hobby") to gather things together and find perspective. (Day 3)

...[Julia] was interacting with her goals and self-reflecting/evaluating really effectively. (Day 4)

[Oona's work was] really reflective... mainly reading work, but different types of reading and a detailed log and she responded to my comments [in the second counselling session] that perhaps she could write more about the reading, which helped to internalise (her word!) it. (Day 10)

In summary, interaction could be seen as central to the learning on the course, whether in the form of traditional social interaction in formal or informal settings or interaction with non-human actors, particularly textual ones. Reflection too can read as a dynamic interactive process, involving a dialogic engagement with the self, as well as a host of other actors, such as counsellors, learning diaries, and bodies of knowledge.

Analysis of the Journal 2: Interactions With and Within ALMS Support Groups

One element of the course that I was particularly interested in was our support groups. Their status as social learning experiences was an important driver in formulating this inquiry and I was keen to reflect on how the students interacted in these specific settings. Some students indeed experienced support groups as traditional "social learning" spaces:

There was more traditional social learning with Ella's book club... they could help each other and it was fun. (Day 1)

However, students sometimes seemed to interact more with the theme of the group, the materials, or the teacher's feedback:

[Julia's] group seemed about input and affordance and opportunity and feedback more than community. (Day 4)

Elias even talked about his interaction with peers' texts, as opposed to the peers themselves:

The support group people's texts gave him ideas, vocabulary and material, but not a whole lot of communicative engagement - but it was still of benefit and he noticed his writing improving as a knock-on effect. (Day 5, Elias)

My journal also notes some students emphasising the learning in the groups, as opposed to the social element, because they afforded “the time and space to practise and learn” (Day 2). The following extract contrasts a support group and more informal *social* interaction with friends:

A group with friends allowed [Sara] to relax and use the language but the vocab support group challenged her to speak more clearly and correctly and complexly - she had to think about it more. And both of these interactions were important. (Day 6)

Support groups in this framing appear as mediators in the learning network: the traditional idea of smooth social interaction conflicting with a cognitive interaction with the target language. This conflict, rather than impairing learning, is seen here to stimulate and support it.

...[in the conversation group] you got the time to speak and people let you go slowly and get the words out. In the everyday conversations... maybe there wasn't so much time or it didn't seem to be as good a place to practise. (Day 2, Anni)

The students interacted with and within the groups to form their learning networks, and the groups themselves were not passive actors in these networks, providing challenging, and sometimes surprising, interactions leading to learning:

...[Iida] was against support groups - it's compulsory “I had to go there”, but she also then said she was surprised how much she enjoyed it. (Day 5)

Support groups can thus be read here as important actors within students' courses, sometimes as sites of interaction with fellow students, but also sometimes providing opportunities to interact with texts, with discourses, and with the language itself. An ANT view of the support groups would not position them as by definition social learning spaces but rather argue that their position in the students' courses is not fixed, and this view can certainly be read in my journal.

Analysis of the Journal 3: Disruptive, Slowed-Down and Limited Interactions

As mentioned in the previous section, some students associated the support groups with what could be described as a slowed-down form of interaction, such as spending time to get the words out or trying consciously to speak more clearly or complexly. The groups were often contrasted with out-of-classroom social situations, with the learning element of the group disrupting the communicative interaction. My journal also refers to this slowed-down or disruptive interaction in other parts of the course too. In the following extract, for example, I note how Aleksi compares academic reading for content with reading for (language) learning:

I think the point about slowing down was really interesting. [Aleksi] now looks up all the words on the academic word list from the abstract before he starts it. If you jump into an academic text you can easily get “overwhelmed”, so the AWL [academic word list] highlighter slowed him down and made him think. It was almost interrupting his reading/ or flow to stop and reposition and learn more effectively. (Day 10)

These slowed-down, disruptive interactions can also be seen in the students managing their learning, where students appeared to scaffold the learning process themselves, rather than having it done for them by a teacher. In the following examples, I noted how Aino deliberately limited her English interactions and gradually increased the difficulty level, with echoes of the zone of proximal development. Jenna rejected certain types of

interaction (speaking English with other Finns) and instead gradually found her own ways into the learning.

Aino also mentioned how interacting with herself and her existing knowledge worked for her - and the previous work built on and led to the later work. "Okay, Now I'm ready for that." (Day 3)

Jenna found interaction with [other] Finns in English terrible but went and did some interaction with non-Finns and that felt easier, and she did the weekly challenges [support group] which gave new ways to study and learn English. (Day 8)

There are, I would argue, clear links to learner autonomy here with the students making choices and taking charge of their own learning. However, the other actors in students' learning networks also had agency and shaped their course choices and activities. Indeed, the disruptive and challenging actors were often highly important in learning, alongside the simpler or easier activities, which helped students get started. Both here can be seen as mediators of learning, playing important roles in creating learning on the course.

Sometimes, however, students did not engage with particular aspects of the course or the language. This limited engagement, perhaps predictably, seemed to correlate with limited learning:

Milla did lots of work on writing, reading and vocab and improved here and enjoyed this. But didn't improve so much in speaking and pron[unciation] because she didn't get involved as much here. (Day 9)

[Elias' course was] not at all a waste of time - but a little bittersweet that he could have engaged that bit more in groups, with his diary, with speaking to others, getting feedback—he could have learned a lot more, I think. (Day 5)

The regret expressed here is of course personal but grounded in my interaction with the students and their own expressions of regret or missed opportunities. Some students, however, deliberately set limits on their engagement, often in support of their own well-being:

Venla and Helmi had very similar ideas in that they set limits on the course and what they wanted to do on it. I think this is... like a form of self protection. [Students] need to set limits in terms of what they do and how much they commit to a course (Day 8)

[Linnea had] a group too, but when it got too big and unwieldy she checked out. (Day 12)

This limiting of engagement is a reminder that the course is just one part of their engagement with English during their life and that English is just one actor in their lives. One student remarked, somewhat pointedly, that the lifewide, lifedeep (Barnett, 2011; Karlsson & Kjisik, 2011) approach in ALMS could be overwhelming:

Olavi commented that on this course I felt like I had to be aware/alert all the time - Can I use this on my ALMS course? Would this be good for my ALMS course? (Day 9)

The variety in type and quality of interactions here can be read as central to the learning and indeed to learner autonomy. Indeed, the fact of interactions being sometimes disruptive as well as facilitative of learning echoes Trebbi's (2008) discussion of constraints in learner autonomy being both necessary and also providing opportunities. Learner autonomy and indeed learning can be read here as successfully managing one's interactions or being a mediator in one's own learning network.

Concluding the Story of Practice and Continuing the Story

This story of practice recounts my puzzling about the meaning of social language learning and a requirement for students to include a social element in their ALMS English course. The puzzling took place initially with a group of students reflecting on their understanding of social language learning at the start of a course. This was both a course task for the students and an opportunity for me to begin a creative inquiry into my puzzle. The inquiry then continued through an analysis of my counselling journal, particularly focusing on one group of students discussing their course experiences and reading this through the lens of actor-network theory (ANT).

While the initial puzzle revealed no simple consensus, it did show diverse, evocative, and sometimes creative responses to the question of how the students understood social language learning. The responses emphasised communication with others, but also learning with and from others, sharing ideas and experiences. The question also revealed differing attitudes to and understandings of learning, raising questions of identity, and provoking affective responses. These responses highlighted the embodied nature of learning, showing that the words *mean to you* were as important as the words *social language learning* in the original prompt: *What does social language learning mean to you?* This highlighted the value of a qualitative, EP approach to the initial puzzle, opening up the idea of social language learning rather than narrowing it down.

The use of ANT as a theoretical lens furthered the inquiry, facilitating a critical reflection on and a playful exploration of the concept of social language learning within my educational context. Central to ANT is the idea that an unexamined label such as *social* hides a complex network of actors—objects, people, ideas—working with and on each other. This focus provided an approach to puzzling about and problematising the concept of social language learning. From an ANT perspective, *social* language learning, like any form of language learning, arises from and is “sustained by multifarious capillaries of associations and activity” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2014, p. 37). My counselling journal and the resulting analysis, thus, followed the actors, tracing the associations and (inter)activity in my students’ courses.

The results of this analysis show students learning by interacting with themselves and other people, but also with texts, contexts, discourses, and the language itself. It suggests too that these interactions are rarely simple, often involving multiple actors, and that disruptive interactions were as important as smooth ones. Where the interactions were limited or lacking, students seemed to learn less.

Limitations and Implications

While the inquiry into social language learning in this story of practice supported and facilitated my own critical and creative thinking, it is important too to acknowledge that it is one story of practice, my story of practice, and indeed only one of my stories of practice. The story is as much, if not more so, about my interaction with the idea of social language learning than my students’. And like my students, I interacted with others, with texts, with theories, and with the structures of the programme in which I work in order to tell the story.

Partial as it is, the story has several implications for my practice as a counsellor on the ALMS course. While the ANT lens encourages me to be cautious of a term like social language learning, the initial inquiry here demonstrated that it was a useful term for starting a discussion with students about what language learning was or could be and what their values were in relation to it.

The inquiry has also encouraged me to think differently about our support groups and the role they play in students' courses. Instead of assuming the groups to be sites of social learning, they are better seen as sites of learning, offering our students many affordances and opportunities for learning interactions. The requirement to take part in at least one support group affords opportunities for new, complex, and unexpected interactions on students' courses. Mercer (2013, p. 394) suggests that complexity approaches to language education have the "potential to prompt alternative ways of thinking and open our eyes to different ways of viewing our classrooms." The ANT lens in this project has performed this function for me, encouraging me to decouple support groups and the social in language learning. This shift supports a focus in counselling discussions on what a support group might offer a particular student. Similarly, it encourages students and their counsellor to be more creative in making their ALMS course social, rather than us ticking a box when the student has participated in a support group.

The requirement for students to include a social element in their course could perhaps, based on this ANT reading, be reformulated as a requirement to engage in new, diverse, and sometimes challenging activities with different people, different texts and in different contexts. This phrasing might I fear be rather unhelpful or unclear for students, but it could inform our group discussions in the opening sessions of the course, focusing our attention on what it means to learn, an essential concern for students charged with becoming more autonomous learners. For me as a counsellor, this reformulation provides a useful heuristic for listening and asking questions about their work on the course.

Ultimately, this inquiry suggests it is problematic to assume that social language learning, or indeed any aspect of language learning like writing or grammar, is a simple, uncomplicated concept. The process of unpacking such a concept, however, has helped me better identify student learning and uncovered opportunities to further support and encourage it in counselling sessions. Framing the inquiry as a puzzle to explore rather than a problem to solve, following the Exploratory Practice approach, has helped greatly to structure and facilitate the process. Likewise, EP's principle of integrating research into pedagogical practice has helped make the work manageable and meaningful for me. This story of practice, thus, emphasises the process of reflective practitioner research: How a critical and creative examination of one's existing practices can suggest new ways of thinking and talking about learning, supporting, and furthering both learners' and teachers' autonomy.

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Review Process

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Fergal Bradley on väitöskirjatutkija Tampereen yliopistossa ja englannin yliopisto-opettaja Helsingin yliopistossa. Hänen opetukselliset ja tutkimukselliset kiinnostuksenkohteensa sisältävät kieliohjauksen/neuvonnan, oppijan/opettajan autonomian, akateemisen kirjoittamisen, identiteetin toisen kielen oppimisessa ja opettamisessa sekä käytännönläheisen tutkimuksen oppimisen ja ammatillisen kehittymisen välineenä.

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Project-Based Learning for Collaborative Fiction Writing: A Problem-Solution Inquiry into Learners' Needs through Practitioner Research in Senior High School

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With the increasing need for fostering 21st-century skills, language educators are seeking effective ways to integrate creativity and collaboration into classroom practice. In the Japanese educational context in senior high school, the recent introduction of *sōgōteki na tankyū no jikan* (総合的な探究の時間) [Time for Integrated Inquiry] in the latest Course of Study has drawn attention to project-based learning (PBL) given their shared emphasis on creativity and learner autonomy. This study explored how a collaborative fiction writing project could promote creativity and active collaboration among senior high school students. Twenty first-year students participated in four fiction writing workshops interwoven into regular English lessons. Data on their needs and problem solution for creating collaborative fiction stories in English were collected through students' reflective responses, questionnaires, and semi-structured group interviews, and teacher journals. The findings revealed the figure of the practitioner who tried to meet students' needs and the figure of students who struggled to integrate their parts of the stories with their group members and devised their own solutions through collaborative interaction. This process not only enabled them to complete the project goals but also demonstrated the potential of this project to foster creativity and constructive collaboration in second-language classrooms.

21世紀型スキルの重要性が高まる中、言語教師は教室での実践において創造と協働を効果的に統合する方法を模索している。日本の高校の教育における文脈では、新学習指導要領に「総合的な探究の時間」が導入され、創造性や学習者の自律を重視するという共通点から、プロジェクト型学習 (PBL) への注目が高まっている。本研究では協働的なフィクションライティング・プロジェクトが高校生の創造力と積極的な協働性の向上にどのように寄与したかについて調査した。20名の高校1年生が、通常の英語授業に組み込まれた4回のフィクションライティング・ワークショップに参加した。英語で協働的にフィクションストーリーを創作する際の学習者のニーズや問題解決に関するデータは、振り返りの記述、質問紙、半構造化グループインタビュー、教師ジャーナルを通して収集された。研究の結果、生徒たちのニーズに応えようとする実践者の姿と、分担した物語の各部分をグループメンバーと一つに統合しようと奮闘し協働的なやり取りを通して自ら解決策を見い出していく生徒たちの姿が明らかになった。このプロセスは、生徒たちがプロジェクトの目標を完遂するだけでなく、本プロジェクトが第二言語を学ぶ教室において創造力と建設的な協働性を育む可能性を秘めていることを示した。

Keywords

project-based learning, problem solution, creativity, collaboration, English education

プロジェクト型学習、問題解決、創造力、協働、英語教育

Project-Based Learning and Creativity in English Education

With changes in society and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), the traditional approach of cramming knowledge in education is reaching its limits. Merely accumulating knowledge will not be enough to compete against AI. Instead, an attitude of applying knowledge across fields with creativity is required. Taking a creative approach to language teaching involves finding innovative methods to navigate and overcome the social and educational limitations. In practice, this involves responding with flexibility and creativity to the constraints that inevitably arise in educational settings, while ensuring that learning remains both effective and engaging. Thus, it would be important to set the themes and topics that are related to real society to elicit students' creativity and autonomy. Creativity and autonomy might not be elicited in classrooms where a one-size-fits-all approach is adopted.

As society evolves, the education system is gradually being transformed. In Japan, the latest Course of Study, *Gakushu Shido Yoryo* (学習指導要領) (MEXT, 2018), emphasizes the importance of integrated inquiry, alongside reforms in university entrance examinations. Recently, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of students entering university through recommendation-based admissions rather than paper-based tests. Thus, I believe that teachers need to strongly consider incorporating more dynamic and imaginative language activities across every subject, in order to better prepare students for a world where AI can accumulate knowledge more efficiently than humans. However, the main focus in English education in Japanese senior high schools remains on the grammar-based approach, with few teachers adopting more learner-centered approaches, like project-based learning (PBL), to foster students' creativity.

In this story of practice, I present a case study of practitioner research in which I incorporated collaborative PBL into senior high school English classes for the first time over a few months. My motivation for engaging in PBL comes from a desire to elicit students' creativity after watching the documentary, *"Most Likely To Succeed"* (Whiteley, 2015) which shows the importance of providing learners with an environment conducive to cooperative inquiry for their project goals. The film inspired me by showcasing students who became more autonomous and creative in learning. Consequently, I wanted to provide my students with similar opportunities through PBL which can develop in learners the skills necessary for success in the 21st century, such as problem-solving, communicative competence, cooperation, decision-making aptitude, and creativity (Bell, 2010; Torres et al., 2017). Thus, I decided to introduce the collaborative fiction writing project to foster active student engagement and help them develop future-ready 21st-century skills.

Literature Review

PBL, Learner Creativity, and Problem Solving

Dooly (2012) defined PBL as "founded on contextualized, learner-centered outcomes and social practices that emerge as the participants collaboratively move toward shared goals and output" (p. 78). Building on this definition, PBL can be understood as a collaborative and communicative instructional strategy in which teachers work alongside learners to create meaningful, real-world learning opportunities. Informed by students' real-life needs, PBL is strategic and often begins with expansive language goals that cannot be achieved in a single lesson but rather are intentionally built toward through daily learning objectives, tasks, and classroom routines that support project goals across a specified timeline (Skalet, 2020). In my practice, for instance, daily objectives focused on promoting fluency through output-based tasks first, followed by feedback aimed at improving linguistic accuracy, and a key language goal was for students to make full use of previously learned vocabulary and grammar to express their opinions in English.

It is also said that high-quality PBL involves six components: (a) authenticity, (b) collaboration, (c) reflection, (d) public product, (e) project management, and (f) intellectual challenge and accomplishment (PBLWorks, 2021). To determine **Authenticity**, it is important to consider conversations with learners to evaluate objectives, tasks, and success (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015). Regarding **Collaboration**, learners are responsible for both their own learning and that of their peers when engaging in pair and group work in the autonomy classroom (Little et al., 2017). The autonomous learners are the ones who can take charge of his or her learning (Holec, 1981), which is closely tied to collaboration because creativity rarely emerges in isolation; rather, it builds on prior work and ideas. As Pennycook (2007) points

out, creative language use and teaching often involve refashioning and recontextualizing the words and ideas of others, which highlights the essentially dialogic nature of language. In this sense, language provides the means for people to think and work together to create conversations, activities, relationships, and societies. Maybin (2011) similarly describes creativity as arising “like a spark between people through the synergy between utterance and response, and through the cumulative crisscrossing chains of utterances and responses which link people together” (p. 129). Extending this view, Philip (2013) emphasizes that creative activities flourish when supported by a “system of interactions” involving leaders at their institution, peers, colleagues, and other experts all working together to create the conditions to foster the “emergence of creativity” (p. 366). Taken together, these perspectives underscore the importance of creating environments in which students can interact meaningfully with each other to foster creativity and collaboration in PBL.

Regarding the **Reflection** component of PBL, it becomes a self-reflective process supported by collaborators, as it is informed by each student’s prior experiences and learning interests. Students reflect on their project engagement in terms of content, language, skills, strategy, process, and product (Stoller & Myers, 2020). One student wrote in the reflection stage as a moment to look back on how imagination and collaboration intertwined in their creative process, *“Since we created a story by predicting the future, we shared ideas using our imagination and tried to draw out each other’s opinions.”* This kind of reflection illustrates how students internalized both creativity and collaboration as essential aspects of their learning. Teachers can also learn a lot from students’ reflections to find out their problems they want to solve. Teachers can provide opportunities for all students to share problems during PBL and to think about the solutions together in reflection processes. Barnes (1976) sought to promote the incorporation of “school knowledge” into learners’ “action knowledge” via the exploratory talk required to complete problem-solving activities carried out in small groups (p. 81). Teachers can identify project strengths and weaknesses for the implications toward future projects through the reflective processes. Learners take an active role in the teaching and learning process as well as in decision making, adopting reflective practices that support both their own learning and that of their peers (Pedder & James, 2012).

As mentioned above, one of the benefits of PBL is to foster creativity (Stoller, 2006), but until relatively recently, it has been a less familiar construct in educational fields. In Japan, for instance, creativity has not traditionally been emphasized in English education, which has long prioritized grammatical accuracy and examination techniques. However, in recent years, creativity is now increasingly seen as having a central role to play in equipping teachers and students for essential 21st-century skills. Bruner (1977) defined creativity as “an act that produces effective surprise,” highlighting the value of novelty in creative activity. Fisher (2004) extended this idea by contrasting true creativity with mere repetition or minor variation, emphasizing that creativity requires doing or thinking of something new and effective. Anderson (2014) further stressed the importance of making connections and solving puzzles, which means that creativity emerges not only from interaction with others but also from linking ideas that are essential from a problem-solving perspective. According to Wertsch (1994), creativity arises from the interplay between what individuals wish to express and what language makes possible, allowing people to solve problems, sustain social relationships, and achieve their aims. Collectively, these accounts emphasize that creativity lies in generating novel and effective outcomes through new connections between ideas and actions, which makes it a crucial competence for problem-solving.

Jones (2012) further argued that the potential of language for creativity lies in its capacity for creative action, offering a way to reconcile the definitions of creativity as both a product

and a process. Referring to high-quality PBL components (PBLWorks, 2021), the product can be understood as **Public Product**, and the process can be **Project Management**. When creativity is viewed as a product, the focus might be on a task outcome such as a piece of student writing. When viewed as a process, the focus is on students' cognitive activity and decision-making when they produce something that would be described as creative (Jones, 2014). The process allows learners to have incidental language learning opportunities, such as writing fiction stories, through which they acquire new vocabulary used in daily conversation. For instance, one group in my class created a role-playing game (RPG)-style battle story. One student reflected that *"because our theme was RPG and fighting scenes, we often needed words we don't usually use."* This comment suggests that creative storytelling encouraged students to explore and internalize new vocabulary that emerged naturally from their narrative ideas, rather than through explicit instruction. In doing so, it creates conditions and environments for **Intellectual Challenge and Accomplishment**.

Purpose of the Inquiry

As shown above, PBL offers numerous educational benefits, such as fostering student creativity and autonomy (Stoller, 2006). I intended to document my first experience of practitioner research on PBL as a form of reflective practice (Pollard, 2008). My motivation behind conducting PBL stemmed from the limitations of former English textbooks used in Japan, which might sometimes not fully support the creativity needed to encourage students to freely express their ideas and thoughts. The textbooks emphasized grammar rules, and the language activities they provided were sometimes out of context. Consequently, I sought to engage students in authentic problem-solving by presenting them with a driving question related to global issues of the near future, thereby providing opportunities for them to articulate ideas derived from their inquiry into the problems. Offering students opportunities for PBL aims to foster the autonomy and creativity necessary for today's challenging society.

My aim in this inquiry was to identify students' lacks, wants, and problems for the Collaborative Fiction Writing Project in English within the context of a senior high school. Students' lacks, wants, and problems were examined through the perspective of needs analysis (Macalister & Nation, 2020). This analysis involves reflective responses, allowing students to reflect on their problems and solutions (Brown, 1995), thereby focusing on the learning process of PBL. Additionally, a series of fiction writing workshops were conducted to provide students with guidance on creating fiction stories, such as developing compelling plots and characters. After each workshop, students collaborated and wrote reflective responses in their L1, capturing both positive and negative reactions about the workshop contents. The data was used to assess how students develop creativity and autonomy through these workshops and group work. At the end of the project, semi-structured group interviews were conducted in Japanese to confirm groups' responses focusing on how to solve problems during collaborative work, followed by a questionnaire with open-ended questions to explore the problem-solving process of PBL in more detail.

Considering PBL to be a powerful tool for practitioners to foster students' creativity and autonomy, this study mainly qualitatively explored how a pilot PBL-informed course design positively affected students' creativity and autonomy. By examining my practice, I formed the following research questions (RQs):

RQ 1. How did I meet students' lacks and wants that arose when they created their fiction stories and took the fiction writing workshops?

RQ 2. How did the learners try to solve the problems they faced during collaborative work?

PBL in my School Context

This section provides an overview of the collaborative fiction writing project for 8 weeks. I worked at a private senior high school that is divided into two courses: music and general courses. While most students in the music course enroll in a music college, most students in the general course enter four-year universities. I primarily taught English to general course students, encompassing three classes with approximately 60 students per year. The participants were first-year high school students (N=20) in one class. Students were divided into groups of four and were responsible for different sections of the plot: (a) exposition, (b) rising action, (c) climax, (d) falling action, and (e) resolution, based on Freytag's Pyramid (Freytag, 1894). Firstly, all group members collaborated to determine the climax section that includes the core message of the story, after which four remaining sections of the plot were assigned to four members individually. Finally, they combined each story section to collaboratively create their final product of the whole fiction story. The theme for fiction writing was a society in the near future (say, 10 years later) where global problems intensify, and technological advancements continue to accelerate.

As many students were new to fiction writing, weekly workshops were implemented as scaffolding support. The fiction writing workshops were divided into four sessions, as shown in Table 1:

1. Explaining story types and eliciting students' ideas,
2. How to develop characters,
3. How to set a story, and
4. Introducing useful websites for fiction writing in English.

These workshops were interwoven into the regular English lessons, and thus participation from all students was expected.

Table 1. *Summary of Workshop Lessons for Fiction Writing*

Workshop Theme	Explanation of Workshop Lessons (Learning Style)
1. Explanation of Project & Story Types	- Showing a future concept YouTube video about Society 5.0 - Explanation of PBL activities and goals (Whole) - Workshop about story type (Whole) - Introduction of Freytag's Pyramid (Whole) - Division of five groups (Group) - Idea sharing (Group) - 10-min Reflection using Forms (Individual) - Homework: Ideas about the climax scene (Whole)
2. Developing Characters	- Discussion about ideas of climax (Group) - Workshop about how to develop characters including the caveat that real names should not be used (Whole) - Discussion about how to include characters in the climax scene (Group) - 10-min Reflection using Forms (Individual)
3. Setting a Story	- Workshop about the plot of the story and key points to write five different sections of plots (e.g., exposition) (Whole) - Discussion about climax part, characters, and overall structure of the story (Group) - 10-min Reflection using Forms (Individual) - Homework: Writing a draft of the part each student is in charge of (Whole)
4. Introducing Useful Websites for Writing	- Discussion to share and connect each story of the assigned part (Group) - Workshop on useful websites referencing flash fiction stories, translating, and revising fiction in English (Whole) - 10-min Reflection using Forms (Individual) - Homework: Presenting the deadline for work completion (whole)

An example of scaffolding provided to introduce this completely new activity was a YouTube video, *"20XX in Society 5.0 --Our future created through digital transformation--(90sec)."* (The original long version of the video has been removed from YouTube, but a 90-second short version remains available: Keidanren, 2020.) Since it was related to our future society, I showed it in class to activate the learners' intrinsic motivation for fiction writing. If the learning environment supports autonomy and offers the right level of challenge and abundant stimulation, students' motivation and desire to learn are more likely to thrive (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Intrinsic motivation is in evidence whenever students' natural curiosity and interest energize their learning.

Research Design

I had my students devote the last 8 weeks of the school year to fiction production, workshops, and group discussions. Workshops and group discussion were held in one class per week when an assistant language teacher (ALT) visited the class. The discussion allowed the participants to share their insights through the workshops and ideas for story production.

The workshops and group discussions were followed by answering reflective questions for 10 minutes, using Google Forms. The questions were developed based on needs analysis (Macalister & Nation, 2020) and Keep, Problem, and Try (KPT) analysis (Cockburn, 2005). As for needs analysis, as a practitioner I asked students to fill in:

Question 1: What they knew about writing a fiction story before,

Question 2: What they found necessary in order to write a fiction story after taking the workshop, and

Question 3: What they wanted to learn about writing a fiction novel in the next workshop.

I intended to make these questions in order to elicit their lacks and wants when they made their fiction story.

In this practice, I also adopted KPT analysis because it encourages students to share and address problems collaboratively through group discussion. KPT was originally proposed by Cockburn (2005) in his workshop as the Keep/Try Reflection. Thus, in my practitioner role I asked students to fill in:

Question 4: As a group, what good points and efforts should be continued,

Question 5: As a group, what current problems and problems may arise in the future, and

Question 6: What they could do to further improve their good points or solve their problems.

I intended to make these questions to elicit students' problems during group work and the way of solving them.

I, as a practitioner, wrote a journal based on the ALACT model (Korthagen et al., 2001; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005) after each workshop lesson. This model is an acronym derived from the first letters of the names of the five phases:

1. Action,
2. Looking back on the action,
3. Awareness of essential aspects,
4. Creating alternative methods of action, and
5. Trial.

To avoid superficial solutions and facilitate comprehensive reflection, eight specific questions from both teachers' and students' perspectives are suggested: thinking, feeling, wanting, and acting. Thus, I tried to reflect on these eight questions in the journal by noting down the teacher's wants when I planned the activity and the teacher's self-evaluation based

on student observations, teacher actions, and ideas for improvement. I had started using these eight reflective questions when I had conducted practitioner research while teaching English at a public junior high school. That earlier experience motivated me to connect my teaching intentions more closely with students' learning needs. The journal information was used to see how I met students' lacks and wants.

After each group completed making their collaborative fiction story, I conducted semi-structured group interviews with five groups in their L1. I asked them to reflect on their experiences during the collaboration process. Each interview lasted approximately 5 minutes (about 30 minutes in total) was audio-recorded and transcribed. The discussions mainly focused on their experiences during collaboration by asking interview questions including the challenges they faced while proceeding with the collaborative project and their solutions to these problems. I collected the transcribed data to confirm their solutions to their problems during group discussion, compared to their reflection after each workshop. In terms of ethics, students understood the purpose of this study and had built trust through my project, which aimed to cultivate the creativity necessary for their future.

Finally, I conducted a questionnaire at the end of the school year again in their L1, asking them to write down any requests they had regarding the workshops to make them better. Then, I asked them to explain how they wrote their fiction as a group and overcame any difficulties they had faced during the group work. I aimed to use this data to see how my fiction writing workshops met their needs for the lacks and wants, and reconfirm their problems and solutions elicited from their reflective responses retrieved from Google Forms and group interviews. Collecting data through students' reflections, my journal, semi-structured group interviews, and the students' questionnaire allowed me to explore my practitioner research with concrete written and spoken evidence of students' collaborative work. This approach enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of PBL process from both my perspective as a practitioner and my students' perspectives as learners.

Analysis

For the data analysis of students' reflective responses, group interview data, and questionnaire, I employed reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). RTA offers a theoretically flexible and qualitative-consistent approach to exploring patterns of meaning in a dataset. Central to this approach is the recognition that themes are not pre-existing to be discovered but are actively generated by the researcher through interpretative engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

While Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six phases of RTA, these phases are a guiding framework rather than a prescriptive sequence. Accordingly, my analytic process was recursive and iterative. I began by immersing myself in students' reflective responses, interview transcripts, and the questionnaire. I then generated inductive codes that captured both semantic and latent aspects of meaning by hand. Codes were collated into clusters, which I developed into candidate themes. Throughout the analysis, I moved fluidly between data, codes, and emerging patterns, refining and reshaping themes as needed. Some were merged, redefined, or discarded. My guiding principle was that themes should represent patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organizing concept, rather than simply summarizing topics of discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This recursive process culminated in a coherent thematic narrative that highlighted connections among autonomy, creativity, and other aspects of learner development. Finally, I translated all the Japanese data into English to report the results in the following findings and discussion section.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, I present the key findings from the RTA analysis. I first describe my actions to students' lacks and wants, then move on to students' solutions to problems during collaboration, and finally discuss how students' collaboration contributed to developing their creativity and autonomy.

My Actions to Students' Lacks and Wants

Table 2 below summarizes how I addressed students' lacks and wants, drawing on the reflective journals written after I conducted workshop sessions.

Table 2. *Students' Lacks and Wants for Writing Fiction from Students' Reflection after Workshops and my Action from Journals*

Workshop	Students' Lacks and Wants	My Action as a Practitioner
1. Explanation of Project & Story Types	- Vocabulary for fiction writing (Lacks and Wants) - Investigation of AI and the social impact of AI (Lacks and Wants) - Setting (theme, background, main character, and story) (Lacks and Wants) - Knowledge about what makes a story hard to predict (Wants)	- Action ①: I asked ALT to pick up expressions that can be useful for fiction writing and the teaching time was included in the workshop. - Action ②: As an introduction to the first workshop, a concept video about Society 5.0 was shown. - Covered as action ④ - <u>Not covered</u>
2. Developing Characters	- Developing main and sub-characters (Lacks and Wants) - Setting the story (climax, rising action, and resolution) (Lacks) - Time for making the story (Lacks) - Vocabulary for fiction writing (Lacks and Wants) - Seeking information about AI and society (Wants)	- Action ③: covered by the second workshop - Action ④: covered by the third workshop - Action ⑤: the time for output in the normal class between the workshops was newly set to be used for group discussion. - Covered as action ① - Covered as action ②
3. Setting a Story	- Setting the story: climax, falling action, and resolution (Lacks and Wants) - Examples and basic ideas for making things relate to each other (Wants) - Vocabulary for fiction writing (Lacks and Wants) - The way of Paying off foreshadowing (Lacks) - Expressions that make the reader feel emotionally involved (Lacks)	- Action ⑥: covered by the third workshop - Action ⑥: covered by the third workshop - Covered as action ① - <u>Not covered</u> - <u>Not covered</u>

Workshop	Students' Lacks and Wants	My Action as a Practitioner
4. Useful Websites for Writing	- Describing the main character and scenes to make the story interesting (Lacks) - Conversational expressions: dialogue and narration (Lacks and Wants) - Translating Japanese into English without relying too much on a translation tool (Lacks) and retaining the nuances of the Japanese language (Wants)	- Action ⑦: covered by the second and third workshop - Action ⑧: covered by the fourth workshop but I should have given examples of expressions for references instead of just giving URLs of English fiction. - Action ⑨: covered by the fourth workshop but I should have shown how to translate Japanese into English on my own.

It can be found that in some cases the workshops could not meet their lacks and wants such as providing a way of avoiding spoilers, paying off foreshadowing, and making the reader feel emotionally involved, which means that the workshop contents can be improved by adding these extra points. One of the students commented in the questionnaire that *"I wanted to first read short stories from abroad before moving on to production."* This means that although I introduced the URLs of fiction stories in the fourth workshop, it might have been more effective to provide them to students in the first workshop. Another student commented that *"If the teachers had first given feedback on students' writing and then shared it with the whole class, the students could have improved their work based on more specific advice."* This suggests that the ALT and I needed to provide timely and formative feedback before sharing their stories with the whole class, so that students can refine their work. As the interactions and language use in various contexts can help identify classroom needs (Little et al., 2017), it would be important to support students' active engagement in the classroom to convey their messages that would sometimes show their needs.

The students reported having lacks and wants to in vocabulary and various multiword expressions and phrases the most. The second most common lacks and wants were the way of story making such as the way of setting stories and developing characters. The third one was technical issues such as time management, foreshadowing, and the use of AI. In terms of vocabulary and multiword expressions and phrases, it could be assumed that students learned vocabulary that was necessary to make their story by themselves through using an online dictionary or AI translation, but I should have provided them with example useful expressions that uniquely appeared in story writing. For example, the opening line of one of the stories is *"Looks like a hermit. You're not a nerd."* However, since such conversational and character-revealing expressions are rarely introduced in textbooks, I assume that students found it difficult to express this idea naturally in English. In terms of technical issues, the workshops could not cover these, which means that adding these points to the new workshops will be improvable points for the future fiction writing project.

To deal with their needs, I noted down some suggestions in my journals for the improvement of the PBL activities. For example, many students reported a lack of time such as:

Because few students can fully concentrate on production near the test period, I wished that at least the idea-generation stage had been scheduled around a long vacation, when it was further away from the exam.

I realized the necessity of rescheduling the PBL implementation period to avoid overlapping with the preparation for the second semester final exam. Thus, it would be better to move the schedule earlier in the second semester. Although it would not be possible to address

all lacks and wants, it is valuable in future studies to investigate students' responses after applying these improvable points in the design of PBL and its workshops.

Solutions to Problems During Collaboration

The responses to RQ 2: "How did the learners try to solve the problems they faced during collaborative work?" are shown in Table 3 that is about students' problems during group discussion from students' reflections after the workshop and solutions retrieved from the questionnaire.

Table 3. *Students' Problems during Group Discussion from Reflection Responses and Students' Solutions from Questionnaire*

No.	Source	Students' Problems from Reflection	Students' Solutions from Questionnaire
1	Workshop 1 Reflection	My group cannot decide on a theme or direction for making our story.	- Shared Structuring and Role Allocation: Establishing a clear direction by first deciding on the overall structure of the story and then allocating individual roles. - Ensuring Consistency and Coherence: Preventing inconsistencies by confirming the story flow together and making final adjustments. - Collaborative Creativity: Enriching ideas by using imagination, predicting the future, and exchanging opinions with one another.
2	Workshop 1 Reflection	The more ideas we got, the harder it was to reflect on all of them.	- Valuing and Integrating Diverse Contributions: By respecting all members' opinions and incorporating diverse ideas, the group created a direction where multiple perspectives could coexist. - Collaborative Elaboration of Ideas: Members enriched the work by building on each other's ideas, reducing redundancy while adding depth.
3	Workshop 1 Reflection	The story is broad and shallow.	- Refocusing the Narrative: Refining the story's direction through discussion to bring greater depth. - Positive and Enjoyable Collaboration: Fostering creativity improvement through enjoyable and engaging conversations.
4	Workshop 2 Reflection	Digging too deep into the setting in too much detail made us lose the big picture.	<u>Not found</u>
5	Workshop 3 Reflection	It was difficult to set the ending part.	- Using a Spoiler as a Narrative Device: Incorporating a spoiler to give the ending distinctiveness and surprise.
6	Workshop 3 Reflection	It was difficult to connect major events together.	- Deliberate Efforts toward Coherence: Through sustained reflection, the group worked to shape the story into one that was both dynamic and coherent. - Imaginative Problem-Solving: Using imagination to adjust and connect different parts of the story smoothly through discussion.
7	Workshop 3 Reflection	There was not enough time for group discussion	<u>Not found</u>
8	Workshop 4 Reflection	It was difficult for my group to review, summarize, and revise the story.	- Integrating Individual Contributions: Each member brought their own work in Japanese, which was then combined into a single story in English. - Revising for Coherence: Adjustments and revisions were made during integration to ensure the story flowed smoothly. - Mutual Review for Accuracy: Members carefully read each other's work to check for errors and inconsistencies and made corrections as needed.

9	Workshop 4 Reflection	It was difficult to see the way of connecting each individual story.	- Collaborative Expansion of Ideas: Starting from one member's idea, the group collectively developed it to create a sense of integration. - Focusing on the Climax as a Unifying Point: Concentrating on the climax as the key element to connect the entire story. - Real-Time Flexible Collaboration Through Digital Tools: Using Google Docs allowed the group to immediately identify discrepancies and inconsistencies and collaboratively adjust such as dividing difficult tasks and complementing on another's roles. - Shared Structuring and Role Divisions: The group first established the overall structure of the story, then created individual parts, connected them, and added what was needed.
10	Workshop 4 Reflection	We felt impatient with the fact that the end of the story had not yet been decided.	<u>Not found</u>
11	Workshop 4 Reflection	We were unable to make a decision based on members' opinions.	<u>Not found</u>

Overall, these findings show that the students used a variety of solutions to deal with problems that arose during group discussions. Most students mentioned comments regarding cooperation such as *"elicited opinions," "contributed to the idea to expand it all together,"* and *"cooperative play."* It can be assumed that peer interactions had an impact on the motivation to create their story. One of the passionate students wrote down the descriptive explanation about overall solution with the whole process as follows:

First, everyone came up with an idea for a rough Japanese word. Then, everyone's ideas were attached together and divided into ascending to descending parts. Then, the roles were divided, and each person wrote a sentence in Japanese except for the climax. The Japanese sentences were read by all members, and we translated Japanese into English in chronological order. The climax was divided into four parts so that each member could finish it at home because it was difficult to find time for everyone to think about the climax together.

As shown above, the group discussion brought about some positive influence on their processes of making stories. To make collaborative fiction successful, supportive relationships with group members can be considered to play a key role. Another important point was reflection time which could be enhanced when students (a) individually or collaboratively develop the motivation to reflect on their previous learning and identify objectives for new learning, (b) when they analyze and evaluate problems they or their peers are experiencing and structure a way forward, and (c) when they act to bring about improvement (Stoller & Myers, 2020).

Solutions to Problems During Collaboration from Group Interviews

Since not every solution in the questionnaire could cover the problems students faced, the following summary of the group interviews digs into the missing solutions summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. *Remaining Students' Problems during Group Discussion and Students' Solutions from Group Interview*

No.	Source	Students' Problems	Students' Solutions from Group Interview
4	Workshop 2 Reflection (Problem) G3 Interview (Solution)	Digging too deep into the setting in too much detail made us lose the big picture.	- Systematic Organization of Ideas: Writing ideas on large paper and then ordering and abstracting them. - Collaborative Verification of Structure: Building consensus and shared direction through collective review.
8	Workshop 3 Reflection (Problem)	There was not enough time for group discussion	<u>Not mentioned</u>
11	Workshop 4 Reflection (Problem) G4 Interview (Solution)	We felt impatient with the fact that the end of the story had not yet been decided.	- Structuring the Climax with a Timeline: Dividing the climax into four parts and setting a rough sequence to envision the ending. - Enhancing Connectivity through Shared Knowledge: Ensuring stronger connections across different parts of the story through reading each other's section.
12	Workshop 4 Reflection (Problem) G2 & G4 Interview (Solution)	We were unable to make a decision based on members' opinions.	- Stepwise Consensus Building: First agreeing on the overall plan and then discussing disagreements. - Structuring Ideas with Narrative Tools: Using Freytag's Pyramid to visualize and organize ideas, which helped them recompose the story. - Establishing a Core Idea First: Deciding on the central idea of the story together first, the group created sentences that maintained coherence with that idea.

As for No. 8 problem: *"There was not enough time for group discussion,"* I commented on my journals: *"Some groups were prepared to share their Google Docs to write on them simultaneously"* (4th Journal). As a solution, groups maximized limited discussion time by collaborating asynchronously online, allowing them to edit simultaneously and by preparing materials in advance, so that face-to-face meetings could focus on decision making. According to the students' responses during group interviews, I found solution 11: *"Dividing climax into four parts"* interesting because their solution was different from what I assumed in the original lesson plan. My plan was that students would make the climax first, and then divide into groups of four to be responsible for different sections of the plot: exposition, rising action, falling action, and resolution. They came up with a new idea: after completing their assigned sections, they decided to rewrite the climax and apply the same four-section division to that climax part as well.

The following examples are extra problem solutions extracted from the interview of Group 4. To address the problem of uncomfortable literal translation, their solution was that *"I looked up all the nuances and replaced them."* A member further explained *"When I translated Japanese literally, it felt a bit off from what I originally wanted to convey. So, I kept rewriting it in a way that everyone could understand, though I felt that some of the nuance was lost in the process."* For another issue of an absentee, Group 4's solution was that *"Not only did I take responsibility for my part, but I also took on other parts of the storyline."* I assume one person in Group 4 heavily contributed to making the story. It would be worth considering whether my support for project management is necessary. Another problem was that *"It*

was difficult to decide on characters' names because in the workshop we were instructed not to use our real names" due to one of the workshop caveats about using real names even in a work of fiction. They overcame this problem as follows: "We translated the name and tried a back-translation to propose the name," which shows their unique solution idea that I had never mentioned in the workshops.

Csikszentmihalyi (2020) and Sawyer (2007) identified particular conditions for creativity in the second-language classroom. These include clear goals for the group learning tasks and all learners' equal and free participation and contribution. When the group members are co-constructing ideas and knowledge, learners and teachers need to share responsibility to support their language use. Group cohesion can be achieved through shared knowledge and ongoing feedback to each other, and there is a necessity of collaborative focus on transforming present understandings into new creative possibilities. The fiction topics that each group chose were quite varied, ranging from social issues such as environmental concerns to personal matters. In addressing these themes, students not only engaged in group research but also reflected on their own experiences. For instance, one group created a story centered on the challenges of high school friends' relationships. Such narratives invite readers into the students' imaginative world, offering insights into their daily and emotional lives. By the end of the project, every group created works of fiction of more than 3,000 words. I believe the reason this PBL approach worked well was that each member had a part they were responsible for, and the group cooperatively integrated different parts of the story. Because everyone took responsibility and contributed to the collective products, they were able to draw on abilities developed through personal experiences and learning. These processes contribute to students' development as creative and autonomous learners.

Conclusion

This inquiry has demonstrated that the collaborative fiction writing project enabled students to develop their creativity and active engagement. The linguistic sophistication required in the fictional creation was a process that was mainly determined by their needs for vocabulary words, accuracy in their grammar, and expressions matching the contexts of their stories. As a student-centered methodology, the creative activity focuses on students' collaborative efforts that engage them in increasing their agency over their own language acquisition (Kavlu, 2017). The findings highlight the potential of PBL to foster 21st-century skills, including collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity. This study also contributes to the understanding of how episodes of collective thinking (Chappell, 2014) can emerge in second language classrooms. For teachers, the findings suggest the importance of providing timely feedback, designing more flexible schedules, and scaffolding students' learning through needs-based workshops. I learned a lot about how students solved problems during collaborative fiction writing. As Little et al. (2017) mention, teaching is learning and learning involves teaching in the autonomy classroom. Writing journals on my practitioner research had two really positive effects for me:

1. I realized I should have done this or that.
2. I will make use of this experience or insight next time.

What I learned from experimenting with PBL will be invaluable for designing and managing the next creative project that my students and I do.

This study was limited to a small group of senior high school students in one context. Further research needs to examine how this collaborative fiction writing project can be adapted across different cultural contexts and educational settings. Ultimately, integrating

collaborative fiction writing into language education is not merely an active engagement, but also a powerful tool of equipping learners with the creativity and problem-solution needed for the challenges of the 21st century. Encouraging collaboration between the practitioner and students to review classroom needs expands what classroom engagement can be because we are all positioned as learners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015) when we learn from each other. This means that it is necessary to have the attitude that future lessons will be created together through active collaboration between teachers and students.

Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Ellen Head and Hugh Nicoll of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.*)

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Communication for Learning and Well-Being: A Reflective Story of Practice of an EFL Teacher and Researcher

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This reflective story details the practice of an EFL teacher/researcher in Japan, whose focus on classroom well-being was prompted by personal struggles following multiple losses and a subsequent depressive episode. The study investigates how mandatory university English conversation courses can foster social connections and learning among post-elementary students at a national university. The research involved implementing theory-based pedagogical interventions, including metacognitive reflection through self- and peer-assessment of speaking performance using video recordings and transcriptions, and peer interaction strategies. The methodology included survey responses, student reflections, and follow-up interviews with five participants. Reflexive thematic analysis identified four themes: *making connections* through English conversation; *learning collaboratively*; *social well-being* around English conversation; and *difference in learning focus*. Findings show the course successfully served as a vital means of social networking, enabling students to develop friendships and collegial working relationships, especially since these courses were implicitly intended for first-year social networking. Students commonly demonstrated an orientation toward kindness and concern for peers' feelings in their feedback, which led to positive emotions like confidence and motivation, and reduced the fear of failure associated with L2 speaking. This emphasis on praise, though sometimes shallow in linguistic detail, supported social and emotional well-being. The study highlights the tension between facilitating meaningful, socially oriented communication and promoting linguistic risk-taking essential and critical feedback for L2 development. Ultimately, the teacher-researcher concludes that embracing diverse forms of feedback and maintaining open dialogue are crucial for supporting both students' development and their well-being.

本省察的実践報告は、日本在住のEFL教師兼研究者の活動を詳述するものであり、私的な喪失体験とそれに続く抑うつエピソードがきっかけで、教室でのウェルビーイングへの意識を高めることに焦点を当てた。本研究は、大学の必修英会話コースが、初級レベルを終えた学生たちの社会的つながりと学習をどのように育むかを調査した。研究には、ビデオ録画と文字起こしを用いたスピーキング・パフォーマンスの自己評価および相互評価、そして仲間との交流戦略を含む、理論に基づいた教育的介入の実施が含まれた。手法には、アンケート、学生の振り返り、および5名の参加者へのフォローアップ・インタビューが含まれた。内省的なテーマ分析により、4つのテーマが特定された: 1) 英会話を通じた「つながりの形成」、2) 「協調的な学習」、3) 英会話をめぐる「社会的ウェルビーイング」、4) 「学習焦点の相違」である。調査結果は、このコースが学生のソーシャルネットワーキングの重要な手段として機能し、友人関係や協力的な関係を築くことを可能にしたことを示した。学生たちは、フィードバックにおいて、親切心と仲間への配慮を示す傾向があり、これが自信やモチベーションなどの肯定的な感情につながり、L2スピーキングに伴う失敗への恐れを軽減させた。このような賞賛を重視する姿勢は、言語的な詳細さに欠けることがあっても、社会的および感情的なウェルビーイングを支えていた。本研究は、社会志向のコミュニケーション促進と、L2言語学習の発展のための批判的なフィードバックや言語的リスクテイクの奨励との間の緊張関係を浮き彫りにしている。最終的に、教師兼研究者は、多様な形式のフィードバックを受け入れ、オープンな対話を維持することが、学生の成長とウェルビーイングの両方をサポートするために不可欠であると結論づけている。

Keywords

well-being, EFL teacher reflection, peer feedback, social networking, collaborative learning
ウェルビーイング、EFL教師の内省、ピアフィードバック、ソーシャルネットワーキング、協働学習

Sixteen years ago I moved from the United States to Japan. The year before I moved I lost a close friend to suicide. The loss was not the reason I moved, but it may have been why I stayed. In the time since then, I went from being a visiting foreigner doing some work while exploring the country, to settling down and starting a family. During the last 16 years, while living far from my home country and the friends I grew up with, I gradually lost more of those friends to different causes. For a time, the losses, although they were people I had been close to, still felt distant—an ocean and most of a continent away.

More recently, I began teaching university English courses, and then my boss encouraged me to pursue postgraduate studies in TESOL. Soon after beginning my studies I was faced with a serious downturn in my own well-being. All of those losses finally caught up to me. Learning to cope has become a newfound impetus for maintaining a well-being-conscious classroom.

Well-being and Ill-being

Losing someone close is never easy, and loss can erode your sense of well-being. The news alone can be overwhelming,

Whether a classmate, "Britney took her life."

A soccer teammate, "Aaron took his family's shotgun and used it to end his life."

A college dormmate and clubmate, "It sounds like Stephen probably took his own life."

A nextdoor neighbor and soccer teammate, "Nick's heart stopped, but the doctors were able to bring him back."

The same friend, again, "In the end, Nick died from the cancer."

A best friend, "Agee died in a car accident. It seems that he was driving tired."

A student, "Yuto drowned after biking all the way to the river and trying to cross alone."

Or an in-law, "Mark, Michiko is dead."

This last shocking news of the death of my wife's close relative must have reminded me of all those earlier losses. Dealing with the loss along with anxiety surrounding the pandemic, stress from work, study, and childcare responsibilities, and meeting my standard for a decent lifestyle mounted into a depressive episode which resulted in sudden hearing loss, permanent tinnitus, panic attacks, and considerable stress on my relationship with my wife.

It is unfortunate that many teachers, myself included, tend not to take action for our well-being until after a major negative event has occurred (Ončevska Ager, 2024; Sulis et al., 2024) when a proactive approach may be beneficial (Roffey, 2012). In my case, even after reaching out for help, getting medicated, reducing my workload, and lowering my standards, many stresses continue to present challenges for my physical and emotional well-being. Fortunately, I have become aware of them as a result. In my experience, it can be difficult to realize the enormity of the pressures we are facing until we buckle beneath them. This is one of the reasons why I think the social aspect of well-being is so important—our network can help us see what we cannot.

I am foregrounding the details of this downturn in my life to give context as to why well-being is now similarly foregrounded in my teaching practice. Another reason is that much of the literature on well-being has an overwhelming slant toward positivity from positive psychology research. While I appreciate this approach, I also think that it is critical to take time and space to share our difficulties and listen with respect to the sometimes haunting lived experiences of members of our communities. Being open about such issues has led to others in my professional community opening up about their own challenges and our developing stronger relationships and support networks. If we can catch one friend, teammate, or student before they fall, it is worth it.

My story explores my journey to understand the relationships between the wellbeing of my students, myself, and our classes together, and also how we can develop social connections for learning and being well. In what follows, I will first explain my teaching context as I have grown to understand it. I will then discuss the triggering effect of the pandemic on both wellbeing and my understanding of the class and learners. After sharing how my approach to fostering learners' English development formalized during my MA

studies, I will introduce the results of that more formal inquiry through reflexive thematic analysis. Before concluding, I will discuss how my understanding has changed and what the results may imply for my own practice as well as more generally.

Teaching Context and Background

I teach four sections of a mandatory English conversation course at a national university. Class sizes are usually under thirty students. The students are mostly post-elementary level English users. To illustrate this context, I describe below an imaginary student who is typical of my classes.

Ryotaro has just begun university. He does not yet have strong relationships with his peers. He is from outside of the prefecture, and has no local social network beyond school. He has formally studied English for six years but has limited oral proficiency (also see Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). He has experience studying English for standardized tests, which are a recurring part of Japanese education (also see Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). He is disinclined to volunteer answers to questions fielded to the class at large. On the other hand, he is comfortable doing group work and consulting with his peers.

I began teaching university in spring of 2019, believing that students like Ryotaro primarily needed practice with speaking and listening. So, I provided opportunities for speaking and listening without much attention to form. I found that through a conversation-heavy, topic-based syllabus they seemed to develop some confidence and fluency, but not much in terms of grammatical accuracy. I also wondered what was actually happening in group conversations, because often when I came to observe, the students would become tense or quiet or shift to engage me in the conversation. These early reflections became part of the impetus for more formal inquiry and pedagogical design described later.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Raised Awareness of Student Well-Being

Less than one year after I started teaching at university, the pandemic erupted. Institutional responses varied around the world. Some programs responded with an explicit focus on teacher well-being (Ončevska Ager, 2024). At my institution there was limited support for instructors. We were given access to Moodle, started asynchronous online lessons, then shifted to synchronous lessons when they became an option.

I later learned that online lessons may have had a significant negative impact on the students' socially situated well-being. Colleagues informed me that face-to-face English conversation courses at my university were implicitly intended as a means of social networking for first-year students. Accordingly, these courses were some of the first to return to face-to-face format even before the measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 had been lifted. Furthermore, many other courses have stayed online even after a general return to campus life, potentially limiting students' opportunities for developing peer relationships.

There were challenges for me too. Fear of contracting or spreading the virus, maintaining understanding and congeniality with students despite masks muffling their voice and hindering facial expression, and trying to avoid showing how scared I was that any of us might be carrying the disease was hard. I regularly did mindfulness meditations in my car before classes when we returned to face-to-face lessons. My anxiety did not fade until after getting medicated for depression and experiencing (fortunately mild) COVID-19 multiple times myself.

For me, the pandemic served as an initial trigger for awareness and reflection on well-being, following Sulis et al.'s (2024) understanding of teacher agency for well-being. The

discussions with colleagues that I mentioned above only happened because of the concern that many of us had for our students. Teaching online, we could not see, hear, or check in on them unless they decided to turn on their cameras and mics or contacted us first. Still, I wanted to know how they were doing.

Reflective Teaching While Studying

I began studying for a master's degree in TESOL in 2023. This coincided with the events that led to my depressive episode. Reflecting critically on my teaching was an aspect of my studies and became a part of my course planning process. Consideration for my own stress was part of that, and concern for students' well-being emerged as a factor as well.

During the pandemic I had used audio-video recordings to review and assess their speaking performances. Initially, I was giving individualized corrective feedback to all of my nearly 100 students. This was an unsustainable practice. Besides the time and energy required, I found myself repeatedly giving similar feedback.

Through my studies I learned of teaching approaches that might address this and other issues I had encountered such as gaining a perspective into group interaction. These included focus-on-form and task-based language teaching (Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996/2023), metacognitive reflection through self-assessment (Butler, 2023; Hosseini & Nimehchisalem, 2021; Huang, 2016) and peer-assessment (De Grez et al., 2012; Little et al., 2025; Patri, 2002), and instruction of language learning strategies (Oxford, 2017) and grammar learning strategies (Pawlak, 2020) in particular.

In the fall of 2023, I recorded student performances again, but as a means for formative self- and peer-assessment rather than reviewing them myself. I also integrated language learning strategy instruction in reflective prompts and began to shift some of the responsibility of finding areas for improvement onto the learners themselves, as in "Write 3 mistakes or things you can do better" from Extract 1.

Extract 1. Fall 2023 Self- and Peer-Assessment Prompts

Self-assessment prompts	Watch the video recording of your performance. Use comments in Microsoft teams. Write 3 points about what you did well. Write 3 mistakes or things you can do better.
Peer-assessment/ feedback prompts	Watch some of your classmates video recordings. Use comments in Microsoft teams. Give them feedback about their English, especially positive feedback! Comment about the content too!

I felt justified in using theory-based pedagogy to simultaneously encourage learners' development and reduce my workload. These activities required students to review the recordings and engage with the language they produced by fixing automatic software transcriptions. (For pedagogic discussions about using speech transcriptions, see Cooke, 2013; Cowie, 2018; Huang, 2008; Lynch, 2001, 2007; Stillwell et al., 2010; York, 2020.) Through such close review of their speech, I hoped they would identify specific errors or concrete areas for improvement. Unfortunately, their reflections were very general and shallow, such as "my pronunciation was poor" or "bad sentences," and did not demonstrate the level of engagement I hoped to encourage.

So, in the spring of 2024, I modified reflective prompts to highlight common errors and difficulties my learners face, with directions to identify specific errors from the transcriptions (see Appendix A). I had hoped that these prompts would scaffold learner awareness which

they could then apply not only to their own performance, but also that of their peers. This did not go as well as I had hoped.

Many students were unable to effectively use the grammar guidance integrated in the reflective prompts. The complexity of the prompts was likely one hurdle (compare Extract 1 and Appendix A). This was true for self-assessment and peer feedback. The peer feedback that was shared was primarily praise with little constructive criticism.

Reflecting on these problems, I simplified as many processes as possible and aligned the self- and peer-assessments directly to the final summative assessment rubric (Nunn, 2000) (compare Appendices B and C). I also implemented peer interaction interventions based on research by Masatoshi Sato and his co-researchers (Sato, 2011, 2013; Sato & Ballinger, 2012; Sato & Perry, 2011; Sato & Lyster, 2012) to draw attention to the value of collaborative learning and encourage learners to see errors as learning opportunities and classmates as potential sources of correction and assistance. By the end of the semester I was pleased with what I saw as improvement in oral performance and use of communication strategies.

I also began to ask students about their experiences. Volunteers participating in my research during the spring of 2024 answered survey questions throughout the semester. Their responses served as a pilot study, based on which I modified the surveys and prepared interview questions (Appendix D). During the fall of 2024 I adapted my data collection method to an opt-out for recording data and reflective activities, and an opt-in for follow-up interviews. Five participants volunteered for interviews. All data from those who opted out have been removed from the following analysis.

Thematic Analysis of Student Reflections and Interviews

The questions I asked in interviews (Appendix D) sought to understand the peer relationships and how those might impact their learning in the class. With a consideration for how these relationships impacted social aspects of well-being, I made meaning of student reflections and interview data using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This involved phases of familiarization through careful reading and re-reading, coding the data, comparing and modifying those codes, identifying salient themes, and writing them up for presentation. I will present the themes and address how these reflect my own changing understanding of my students, our well-being, and the collaborative learning opportunities emerging in my courses. The four themes identified were (a) making connections through English conversation, (b) learning collaboratively, (c) social well-being around English conversation, and (d) difference in learning focus.

Making Connections Through English Conversation

Since the English conversation course had been implicated as a means of social networking for students, this was one of the propositions I explored through the surveys and interviews. The students' responses painted an interesting and complex picture of how the course served this purpose. Through taking the course, many students made both friendships and collegial working relationships, not all of which overlapped. Interviewees described a variety of social networks developed both on and off campus. For some, English conversation was one of a few spaces on campus to develop their social network. This was afforded primarily by opportunities to communicate with each other through conversation activities and other collaborative classwork. Some students said they wanted to or appreciated the chance to talk to as many classmates as possible. The autobiographical content of conversation

activities in particular led to students connecting with each other on the basis of their backgrounds and shared interests.

In inquiring as to the actual status of friendships among class members, of those who answered, most reported having made just two, three, or four friends in the course. Answers, such as the following from a follow-up interview, suggested that in some cases this was sufficient.

Aoma¹: Actually, I don't want to make new friends.

Me: Oh, really?

Aoma: Because I want to stay now. Now's point.

Aoma made a few good friendships and was not looking for more. Another interview response led me to realize how I facilitated this networking through my role as a teacher.

Me: What helped you to make new friends with your classmates?

Airi: In [English conversation]² 2 class? You said to make new friends in group. So, I can make new friends to talk.

The wording I used when directing students to change groups during class was, "Change groups, make new friends." It seems that, although my intent was to clarify my directions through elaboration, this student took my words literally, leading her to developing a new friendship. It seems that in facilitating collaborative learning, teachers may become social matchmakers without intending to do so.

Learning Collaboratively

Students' reflections gave considerable insight into the quality and impact of such collaborative classroom work, peer-feedback, and peer-assessment. On the whole, a large portion of the students reported feeling classmate relations helped their English development. (Specific collaborative learning results are substantial and may be addressed in a future publication.) The qualities that interviewees reported desiring in their groupmates varied from person to person, but included empathy, proactivity, communicativeness, and motivation.

When assessing each other's speaking performances, many students expressed a clear concern for each other's feelings, even when feedback was anonymous.

Kei: I felt like a teacher to tell other person's [sic] scores. But... そんなくがないようにするのは難しい [It is difficult to be impartial because I want to consider their feelings.]³

This was realized in a tendency towards leniency in the scores or comments that they offered each other, and summarized succinctly by the following interviewee.

Asato: Student is kind, but 点数 [scores] up.

On the receiving end there were those who mentioned that more critical feedback might be more useful. Some noticed and tried to offer detailed feedback where they could, as seen in the following extract.

Airi: Many people [give the] same [score] so different I I want different score もっと細かく [more detailed.]

1. All student names are pseudonyms.

2. Bracketed text has been changed or removed for contextual reasons.

3. The students' comments in Japanese have been translated by the author.

It seems that my observation about the limited extent to which peer feedback offered constructive criticisms was echoed in the students' reflections. However, the data also showed how this kindness and concern for feelings were valuable for the class in terms of social and emotional well-being. Following these observations, I would like to move forward by bringing all of the students into a discussion of the importance of balancing kind and caring comments with constructive criticism and thus raising their awareness while still giving them the agency to give feedback as they think best.

Social Well-Being Around English Conversation

In response to "What kinds of feedback did you give your classmates throughout this unit?", two responses in particular were representative of this orientation toward encouraging praise as feedback:

good things to make happy

これから英語に対して積極的になれるように、その人自身の良い点を人よりも多く見つけるつもりで感想を送った。[I gave feedback with the intention of finding more good things about the person than others could so that they would become more proactive towards English.]

The overall student focus on peer praise is perhaps unsurprising considering the threat to face involved in presenting publicly in a second language. In unit-end reflections immediately following those presentations and peer feedback, students often reported positive emotions such as happiness, relief, satisfaction, fun, confidence, and motivation. These reports of confidence and motivation were heartening for me as a teacher. Though fewer in number, negative emotions were also expressed. A few, such as boredom, tiredness, worry, and nervousness were among those mentioned. It seems from the point of view of many of the students these presentations were valuable growth experiences, and perhaps aided by the support of encouraging peers. One comment reflected this positive impact of peer interaction quite clearly,

失敗しても笑われないため、失敗を恐れないようになった。[They didn't laugh at me even when I failed, so I'm not afraid of failing anymore.]

Other student reflections suggested failures in establishing collaborative relationships due to communication difficulty or awkwardness. One student reported having been left out of a three-person group. Whether they meant they were sitting alone instead of in a group, or they were unable to engage with their group members is impossible to determine in retrospect, but it does suggest the importance of finding ways to keep dialog open between the students and the instructor, such that these issues could be prevented or mitigated. These reflective reports are one, albeit tardy and insufficient, means of doing so.

Concerns about peer relationships were also present in the reflections. The following student expresses concern regarding the social chemistry, acknowledging that just meeting people alone is not sufficient for developing social relationships.

積極的に話しかけることが大事。ただ、相性もあるため注意が必要。[Being proactive in talking is important, but it's also necessary to be careful of how we get along.]

The following student expressed anxiety about over-reliance on their peers.

あまりよく思われていないと思う。毎回のように友人になんて言っているのかを聞いていたため。[I don't think they thought very well of me. The reason being that I asked my friends what was said almost every time.]

These voices of concern and negative experiences are welcome. I am encouraged that the students felt open in sharing them. I feel sure that other students had similar or other problems but did not voice them. This variability in voice and sharing connects to the final theme.

Difference in Learning Focus

In reviewing the reflections, it became clear to me that learners' focus throughout the course was highly variable and depended upon the learner's individual experience with the task, content, and peer learning context. This aligns with the pedagogical principle that students do not necessarily learn what is presented to them, but instead learning takes place according to their own stage of development (Ellis et al., 2019, p. 155).

The rubrics used for self-, peer-, and instructor assessments (Appendix B) broadly addressed five areas—vocabulary, grammar, content, pronunciation, and conversation management. The most common linguistic focus in reflections was on vocabulary, followed by grammar, content, and then pronunciation. A large number of reflections focused instead on aspects of public speaking and presentation skills such as physical behavior, vocal quality, and speaking speed. It became clear that for some of those who avoided giving feedback on the linguistic aspects, it was due to a lack of confidence in their own L2 knowledge:

自分は文法が正しいかどうかははっきりわからないので、声の大きさや表情、話す内容などについて書いた。[I didn't know for sure whether the grammar was correct or not, so I wrote about volume of voice, expression, and the content of the speech.]

Concrete linguistic feedback from peers was seen as extremely valuable, but rare:

クラスメイトからのフィードバックで新たな表現や、文法・発音の間違いなどのフィードバックをされたときはとても役に立ったがその様なフィードバックは少なかった。[It was really useful when I got feedback from classmates on new expressions or things like grammar and pronunciation mistakes, but there wasn't much of that kind of feedback.]

This provides a segue into the difference between the students' focus and my own as an instructor, interested in both ensuring students' well-being and learning. As a language teacher, I was primarily interested in fostering my students' English development in terms of contextual appropriateness and lexico-grammatical complexity, accuracy, and fluency. In the past I was frustrated by shallow, public-speaking oriented peer feedback because of the intentions mentioned above. However, from this study I have grown to appreciate the reason for it.

Now, realizing more fully the value of diverse types of peer feedback, I would like to legitimize the varied types of feedback that students give. The motivational "make them happy" feedback seems to play an important part in creating a supportive classroom climate where people can overcome socially challenging, face-threatening speaking tasks (Gregersen, 2023; Horwitz et al., 1986). The reports of success, satisfaction, and confidence offer some evidence that the peer feedback was related to positive experiences of success. Further, reports of growth, learning, and raised awareness support the value of peer feedback throughout the course. I personally cannot provide intensive comprehensive feedback for all students throughout all tasks, but I can try to create situations and tasks where students are more confident in providing the feedback they are able and perhaps suggest more effective forms of praise that may contribute more to growth (Zarrinabadi et al., 2023). With more hands on deck, we can cast a wider net catching both more non-target

like language products and unhelpful social situations and then reel them in to see what that net caught, and talk about it together.

Further Discussion and Areas for Future Research

I approached this study from a place of wanting to know how my students were doing in this context and to what extent I should be concerned about their well-being. Having seen what can happen when our network fails us, I wanted to evaluate that which my students were developing. Thus, it is deeply grounded in this context and therefore limited in the degree to which the findings might be generalized. Having said that, there are several tensions apparent in the data, my observations, and the literature that may be relevant beyond my local context.

First, students show a strong desire to communicate with each other, partly because the class serves as one of few such opportunities on campus. However, this communication is sometimes prioritized over content learning, meaning learners employ various face-saving and communication strategies including avoidance as opposed to taking risks with using English. Trying new structures and playing with language is important for L2 development (Cook, 2000). So, I want to explore ways of respecting this need for meaningful socially oriented communication and at the same time fostering learners' desire and willingness to experiment and play with spoken English both individually and socially.

I believe that the peer interaction interventions did contribute to a positive collaborative mindset as suggested by Sato (2017). I also think that regular use of self- and peer-assessment that was aligned with instructor assessment encouraged students' monitoring of their own output and metalinguistic awareness. Considering the positive results of similar practices for encouraging L2 production (Murakami et al., 2012), it would be worthwhile to investigate the results of this implementation of assessment more rigorously. Challenges that remain include reducing the hurdles for learners to approach me with questions about language or concerns about the (collaborative) learning situation in the course. As it is, students rarely approach me on their own accord except to ask about homework details or deadlines, so asking them through surveys and reflection prompts was critical.

Several new questions have also arisen for me. Where does the line between friendship and effective group member overlap and where does it conflict? Can this tension be managed organizationally by varying group composition? I can speculate that very close friends may make less constructive learning relationships, in part because so much is already shared between them. Having room to explore connections through communication may be part of the benefit of less developed relationships. Also, based on the students' comments, I wonder if alternatives should be offered for students who find group work categorically off-putting. Further, what might that look like? I find it hard to imagine a face-to-face communication-based class without direct oral communication, but digital media might afford a feasible alternative through recording and publishing, especially since these are tasks my students already perform.

Asking questions has improved my awareness of the social situation in my course and how it interacts with student well-being and development. Answering those questions may also have increased the students' awareness as well. I would like to continue to ask these types of questions and involve students more, as they are willing, such that they might become more engaged in creating a positive learning environment for themselves and their peers. Such participatory research may also motivate students to share valuable information which can help me as a teacher-researcher to understand and take action to

serve their needs. Ultimately, I think the most important take-away from this has been a focus on keeping the dialog open.

Conclusion

I want to bring the story back to me now at the end of this article. One reviewer suggested about an earlier draft of this article that I was oversharing and that readers may be worried about my well-being. I want to firmly push back against this suggestion to refrain and hold back from sharing. Sharing is what allows us to become aware of each other's needs and abilities, this very much arose in the students' voices in this study. Worry and concern are part of social relations, an important part.

Four years before Britney chose to end her life, she told me that she had been thinking about it. I knew that was serious, even then as a high schooler. However, I did not know what to do. I tried my best to support her alongside our mutual friends. What I know now is that I should have asked for professional help. One of the hardest parts about loss is wondering if there wasn't something more you could have done. If I had worried more and forged a stronger network of connections with some of the people that I lost, I might have helped them to find the help they needed, whether from me or some more capable other. I am happy to say that I feel well supported by my network now, but that was not always the case. It was by sharing and connecting that I forged those supportive relationships.

AI Usage Disclosure

Generative AI and machine translation were used in the production of the abstracts, keywords, and translation of the author bio.

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Review Process

This article was blind peer-reviewed by members of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.)*

Author Bio

Mark Johnson works in Kochi, Japan, in multiple educational settings. His research has two main strands. The first, including this article, emerges from his learners' needs and teaching context. The second is focused on stories, play, and their intersection in collaborative storytelling games. When not teaching, he is often playing tabletop games, tending his permaculture garden, or making things. Whenever possible, he cycles to work.

マーク・ジョンソンは日本の高知県で複数の教育現場に携わっている。彼の研究には二つの主な流れがある。一つ目は、本稿を含む学習者のニーズと教育現場から生まれた研究である。二つ目は、物語と遊び、そして協働的ストーリーテリングゲームにおけるその交差点に焦点を当てた研究である。教鞭を執っていない時は、テーブルゲームを楽しんだり、パーマカルチャーの畑の手入れをしたり、ものづくりに没頭したりしている。可能な限り自転車で通勤している。

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Appendix A. Spring 2024 Reflection Prompts

Self-assessment prompts	C. Next, review the video recording and transcript of your performance. Find and write three things that you did well. 1. 🍌 _ 2. 🍌 _ 3. 🍌 _ D. Next, think about how you could have improved your performance. Do any of the following apply? Read the prompts. Find three (or more) that match your thoughts about your performance. Finish them by filling in the blanks. You can use the same prompt again with different details. Feel free to copy and paste. “I was very concerned about _____” a. Remembering what to say. b. Using correct grammar. c. Using good pronunciation d. My posture, body language, or eye contact. e. Other _____ “I [sometimes / often] forgot to use _____” f. Sequence words [順序を表す句] (first, next, then, after that, etc.) g. Articles [冠詞] (a/an/the) h. Counters [数えるための名詞] (a bowl of, a piece of, etc.) i. Plural forms [複数形] (cats, children) j. Subject pronouns [主語の代名詞] (I, he, you, they) k. Subject/Verb agreement [三単現の「s」] (He likes cheese) l. Other [他] _____ “I used the [expression / word] _____ too much. I could have also said _____” m. “very” / “really”, “pretty”, “quite” n. “maybe” / “I think ~”, “might (be)”, “could (be)” o. “[I/he/she] like(s)” / “~ is interested in ...”, “~ is into ...”, “~ prefers ...” p. Other _____ “I forgot to put clauses after the words they modify [後置修飾を忘れた], for example _____” “I used the wrong [word/expression]. I said _____, but I should have said _____.” “This sentence was very short: _____. I could have also added _____.” 1. 🍌 _ 2. 🍌 _ 3. 🍌 _
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Peer-assessment / feedback prompts	Watch your classmates' performances. Give them feedback about their English, especially positive feedback! Comment about the content too! C. Write things that they did well. D. How could they have improved the performance. Do any of the following apply? Use the prompts to give constructive feedback. Feel free to copy and paste. "They seemed concerned about _____" Remembering what to say. Using correct grammar. Using good pronunciation Posture, body language, or eye contact. "They [sometimes / often] forgot to use _____". Sequence words [順序を表す句] (first, next, then, after that, etc.) Articles [冠詞] (a/an/the) Counters [数えるための名詞] (a bowl of, a piece of, etc.) Plural forms [複数形] (cats, children) Subject pronouns [主語の代名詞] (I, he, you, they) Subject/Verb agreement [三単現の「s」] (He likes cheese) Other [他] _____ "They used the [expression / word] _____ too much. They could have also said _____" "very" / "really", "pretty", "quite" "maybe" / "I think ~", "might (be)", "could (be)" "[I/he/she] like(s)" / "~ is interested in ...", "~ is into ...", "~ prefers ..." Other _____ "They forgot to put clauses after the words they modify [後置修飾を忘れた], for example _____" "They used the wrong [word/expression]. I said _____, but I should have said _____." "This sentence was very short: _____. They could have also added _____."
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Appendix B. Self-assessment rating scales (English and Japanese)

Self-Assessment Criteria: Rating Scales

Keeping Going: Turn-taking and Initiative

0-1	Did not join in a conversation or discussion with others.
2-3	Could not keep the conversation going at all. Needed help all the time. The conversation stopped many times.
4-5	Rarely started a new topic or question. Responded minimally to other speakers. Sometimes supported other speakers. Communication sometimes stopped.
6-7	Responded fully to other speakers. Supported other speakers. Sometimes started new topics or questions. Communication almost never broke down.
8-9	Took initiative. Started new topics or questions when appropriate. Helped others to join in. Interrupted politely when appropriate.
10	Did not hesitate to engage, start new topics, or yield turns when appropriate. Could hold ground even when others attempted to dominate the conversation.

Keeping Going: Negotiation

0-1	Did not join in a conversation or discussion with others.
2-3	Could not keep the conversation going at all. Needed help all the time. The conversation always stopped.
4-5	Negotiated rarely. Used only a very limited repertoire of conversational techniques. Communication sometimes stopped.
6-7	Used a few different techniques for negotiation. Communication almost never broke down.
8-9	Could negotiate whenever necessary. Used a wide repertoire of expressions and techniques.
10	Could negotiate with appropriate techniques and expressions to match any situation that came up.

Content: Information

0-1	Did not attempt to share information.
2-3	Could not communicate basic information such as age, price, etc.
4-5	Could only communicate very basic information.
6-7	Could communicate information on a reasonable range of topics.
8-9	Good ability to communicate information on a variety of topics.
10	Could communicate information on any general topic without trouble.

Content: Ideas and Opinions

0-1	Did not attempt to express ideas or opinions.
2-3	Could not even express basic likes or dislikes.
4-5	Could only express ideas or feelings about the most basic everyday topics.
6-7	Could express opinions, feelings and ideas to a certain degree on a limited range of topics.
8-9	Good ability to express feelings, opinions, and ideas on a variety of topics.
10	Can express feelings, opinions, and ideas on any general topic without trouble.

Intelligibility: Pronunciation of Individual Sounds

0-1	Did not speak.
2-3	Voice is too quiet or unclear for listeners to hear.
4-5	Poor pronunciation of individual sounds. Compensated for pronunciation problems with gestures, other language, or other means.
6-7	A reasonable pronunciation of individual sounds. Some pronunciation problems with wrong sounds.
8-9	Accurate pronunciation of individual sounds. Very few pronunciation errors with wrong sounds.
10	Native-like pronunciation of individual sounds. No errors stood out.

Intelligibility: Pronunciation of Stress/Prominence

0-1	Did not speak.
2-3	Voice is too quiet or unclear for listeners to hear.
4-5	Not enough use of stress/prominence. Compensated for stress/prominence with gestures, other language, or other means.
6-7	Tried to make important syllables prominent. Some problems with missing or misplaced stress/prominence.
8-9	Good use of stress/prominence. Very few pronunciation problems with missing or misplaced stress/prominence.
10	Native-like stress/prominence. No errors stood out.

Intelligibility: Grammar

0-1	Did not speak.
2-3	Poor grammatical structure.
4-5	Grammatical structure has problems. Compensated for structural problems with gestures, other language, or other means.
6-7	Grammatical structure is mostly appropriate for the task. Some errors. Errors are not major.
8-9	Good use of grammatical structure. Very few errors. Errors are minor.
10	Native-like use of grammatical structure. No errors stood out.

Intelligibility: Vocabulary

0-1	Did not speak.
2-3	Not enough vocabulary. Inappropriate use of vocabulary.
4-5	Limited vocabulary. Compensated for lack of vocabulary with gestures, other language, or other means.
6-7	Vocabulary is mostly enough for the task. Some errors. Errors are not major.
8-9	Good use of vocabulary. Very few errors. Errors are minor.
10	Native-like use of vocabulary. No errors stood out.

Keeping Going: Turn-taking and Initiative

0-1	他の人との会話や議論に加わらなかった。
2-3	会話が全く続かなかった。常に助けが必要だった。会話が何度も途切れた。
4-5	ほとんど新しい話題や質問を始めなかった。他の話者への反応は最小限だった。他の話者をサポートすることもあった。コミュニケーションが時々止まる。
6-7	他の話者に対して十分に反応した。他の話者をサポートした。新しい話題や質問を始めることがあった。コミュニケーションが途切れることはほとんどなかった。
8-9	積極的に発言した。適切な場合、新しい話題や質問を始めた。他の人の参加を助けた。適切な場合には礼儀正しく中断した。
10	適切な場合には、参加したり、新しい話題を始めたり、順番を譲ったりすることをためらわなかった。他の人が会話を支配しようとしても、その場を守ることができた。

Keeping Going: Negotiation

0-1	他の人との会話や議論に加わらなかった。
2-3	会話が全く続かなかった。常に助けが必要だった。いつも会話が止まっていた。
4-5	ほとんど交渉しなかった。ごく限られた会話テクニックのレパートリーしか使わなかった。コミュニケーションが時々止まってしまう。
6-7	交渉のために数種類のテクニックを使った。コミュニケーションが途切れることはほとんどなかった。
8-9	必要であればいつでも交渉できた。幅広い表現やテクニックのレパートリーを使った。
10	どのような状況にも適切なテクニックと表現を使って交渉することができた。

Content: Information

0-1	情報を共有しようとしなかった。
2-3	年齢、価格などの基本的な情報を伝えられなかった。
4-5	ごく基本的な情報しか伝えられなかった
6-7	それなりの範囲の話題について情報を伝えることができた。
8-9	様々な話題について情報を伝える能力がある。
10	一般的な話題であれば、問題なく情報を伝えることができた。

Content: Ideas and Opinions

0-1	アイデアや意見を表現しようとしなかった。
2-3	基本的な好き嫌いさえ表現できなかった。
4-5	最も基本的な日常の話題についてしか、考えや感情を表現できなかった。
6-7	限られた範囲の話題について、ある程度意見、感情、考えを述べることができる。
8-9	様々な話題について、感情や意見、考えを表現する能力がある。
10	どんな一般的な話題についても、問題なく感情や意見、考えを表現できる。

Intelligibility: Pronunciation of Individual Sounds

0-1	話せなかった。
2-3	声が小さすぎたり、不明瞭で聞き取りにくい。
4-5	個々の音の発音が悪い。ジェスチャーや他の言語、その他の手段で発音の問題を補った。
6-7	個々の音の発音が妥当である。発音に問題がある。
8-9	個々の音の発音が正確。間違った発音がほとんどない。
10	個々の音の発音がネイティブに近い。目立った間違いはない。

Intelligibility: Pronunciation of Stress/Prominence

0-1	話せなかった。
2-3	声が小さすぎたり、不明瞭で聞き取りにくい。
4-5	強弱の使い分けが不十分。ジェスチャー、他の言語、または他の手段で補った。
6-7	重要な音節を目立たせようとした。強弱の使い分けに欠落や配置ミスがある。
8-9	強弱の使い分けがうまい。欠落や見当違いによる発音の問題はほとんどない。
10	ネイティブのような韻律。目立ったミスはない。

Intelligibility: Grammar

0-1	話せなかった。
2-3	文法構造が悪い。
4-5	文法構造に問題がある。構造上の問題をジェスチャーや他の言語、その他の手段で補った。
6-7	文法構造はタスクに対してほぼ適切。多少の誤りがある。誤りは大きくない。
8-9	文法構造をうまく使っている。誤りはほとんどない。誤りは小さい。
10	ネイティブらしい文法構造の使用。目立った誤りはない。

Intelligibility: Vocabulary

0-1	話せなかった。
2-3	語彙が不十分 不適切な語彙の使用。
4-5	語彙が限られている。ジェスチャー、他の言語、または他の手段で語彙の不足を補った。
6-7	語彙は課題に対してほぼ十分。多少の誤りがある。誤りは大きくない。
8-9	語彙をよく使う。誤りはほとんどない。誤りは小さい。
10	ネイティブらしい語彙の使い方。目立った誤りはない。

Appendix C. Self-Assessment Form

Name:

Student Number:

Performance:

Area	Sub-area	Self-score (0-10)	Evidence
Keep Going	Turn-taking and Initiative		
	Negotiation		
Content	Information		
	Ideas and Opinions		
Intelligibility of Pronunciation	Individual Sounds		
	Stress/Prominence		
Intelligibility of Grammar/Vocabulary	Grammar		
	Vocabulary		

Appendix D. Interview Protocol

1. Thanks for coming today. How are you?
1 今日は来てくれてありがとう。お元気ですか？
2. I'm going to interview you in English and record the interview. If you have any questions, please ask. This isn't a test! We can use some Japanese to support understanding.
2 これから英語でインタビューし、録音します。質問があれば聞いてください。これはテストではありません！理解を助けるために日本語を使うこともできます。
3. What's your name?
3 お名前は？
4. How old are you?
4 何歳ですか？
5. Where are you from?
5 出身はどこですか？
6. Did you have a social network (friends, family, or other support) in Kochi when you came to KU?
a. Do you have such a social network in Kochi now?
6 KUに来たとき、高知にソーシャルネットワーク(友人、家族、その他のサポート)はありましたか？
a 現在、高知にそのようなソーシャルネットワークはありますか？
7. You wrote that you made about ~ friends through our English conversation course. Was that from this semester or last semester or both?
a. How does this number compare with the number of friends you made through:
i. other courses you were taking,
ii. clubs or organizations you participate in, and
iii. extracurricular activities like part time work?
b. (Did they?) What helped you to make new friends with classmates in our course?
c. What has helped make those relationships stronger?
d. Has anything in our course caused trouble for those relationships?
7 英会話コースで～人の友達ができたと書いていますが、それは今学期ですか、それとも前学期ですか？それは今学期ですか、前期ですか、それとも両方ですか？
a この数は、次のようなことを通してできた友達の数と比べてどうですか？
i. 他のコース
ii. あなたが参加しているクラブや団体、そして
iii. アルバイトなどの課外活動でできた友達の数と比べてどうですか？
b このコースでクラスメートと新しい友達を作るのに役立ったことは何ですか？
c また、そのような関係をより強くするために役立ったことは何ですか？
d 私たちのコースの中で、そのような人間関係に支障をきたすようなことがありましたか？
8. Are the kinds of relationships you made through our English conversation course similar or different from those you made through other courses and activities? In what ways?
8 英会話コースで築いた人間関係は、他のコースや活動で築いた人間関係と似ていますか、違いますか？どのような点でですか？
9. What kind of person makes a good friend, in your opinion?
9 どのような人が良い友達だと思いますか？
10. What kind of person makes a good class partner or group member?
10 どのような人が良いクラスのパートナーやグループのメンバーになりますか？

11. Does working with your classmates help you learn?
 - a. If yes, in what ways?
 - b. If no, why not?
- 11 クラスメートと協力することは、あなたの学習に役立ちますか？
 - a 「はい」の場合、どのような点で役立ちますか？
 - b 「いいえ」の場合、その理由は何ですか？
12. What did you think about the (score-based/comment-based) peer feedback about the self-introduction performance?
 - a. Did this impact the way you think about your speaking? How?
 - b. Did it impact your confidence in your English?
 - c. Did it help you notice anything about your speaking or English?
 - d. Do you remember how you felt when you read the feedback?
 - e. Would you rather get (score-based/comment-based) peer feedback?
- 12 自己紹介のパフォーマンスに関する(点数ベース／コメントベースの)仲間からのフィードバックについてどう思いましたか？
 - a それはあなたのスピーキングに対する考え方に影響を与えましたか？どのようにですか？
 - b 自分の英語に対する自信に影響しましたか？
 - c 自分のスピーキングや英語について何か気づききっかけになりましたか？
 - d フィードバックを読んでどう感じたか覚えていますか？
 - e 点数ベース／コメントベースの)相互フィードバックの方がいいですか？
13. Did getting peer feedback impact how you give feedback to other students?
 - 13 ピアフィードバックを受けることは、他の生徒へのフィードバックの仕方に影響しましたか？
14. What do you think would make English conversation class a more socially comfortable space to learn English?
 - 14 英会話のクラスをより社会的に快適な英語学習の場にするにはどうしたらいいと思いますか？

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Exploring Japanese Language Literature to Enhance Higher Cognitive Skills in Intermediate-Level College American Students: Supplemental Materials and Motivation

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This study examined motivation, learning materials, and the application of Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) among intermediate-level students in a Japanese literature class, with the aim of enhancing their cognitive abilities and improving the course design in the target language. Using Yin's (2018) interpretive multiple-case study approach, qualitative data were collected from eight American students enrolled in a 300-level Japanese course according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency scale. Through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, students revealed a rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives, offering insight into how they engaged with and interpreted the literature course. The findings revealed that novice-intermediate learners of Japanese require appropriate and sufficient learning support to comprehend literary content and develop higher-order cognitive skills aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy—such as comparison, analysis, synthesis, and creativity. Moreover, the study found that students were able to foster autonomous learning and well-being, which in turn promoted intrinsic motivation throughout the learning process.

本研究は、中級レベルの日本文学クラスにおいて、学生の動機づけ、学習教材、およびブルームのタクソノミーを分析し、彼らの認知能力を向上させ、対象言語の文学コースを改善することを目的とする。質的データは、Yin (2018) の解釈的な複数ケーススタディ手法を用いて収集され、2023年春学期に全米外国語教育協会 (ACTFL) の習熟度ガイドラインに基づく日本語3年目のコースを履修した南カリフォルニア在住の8名のアメリカ人学生の経験と視点に焦点を当てた。アンケート、面談、教室内での観察を通じて、学生たちは日本の文学コースに対する異なる経験と視点を共有した。調査の結果、日本語の中級学習者は物語の内容を理解し、比較、分析、設計、創造などのブルームのタクソノミーに基づくより高い認知スキルを養成するために適切かつ十分な学習補助が必要であることが明らかとなった。さらに、本研究では、学習者が自律的な学習やウェルビーイングを育むことができ、それが学習過程全体において内発的動機づけを促進したことが明らかになった。

Keywords

Japanese literature, motivation, supplemental materials, Bloom's taxonomy, cognitive skills, autonomy learning, well-being
日本文学、モチベーション、補足資料、ブルームのタクソノミー、認知スキル、自立学習、ウェルビーイング

Teaching university students in California, I have often wondered how intermediate-level learners engage with Japanese literature and what motivates them to learn. One challenge I face as an instructor of Japanese language and literature for American students is helping them connect personally with the texts while developing deeper critical thinking skills. In order to understand this better, I explored how intermediate-level students in a Japanese literature course were motivated to learn, how they interacted with the course materials, and how they demonstrated learning through Bloom's taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). The Taxonomy could be applied to deepen their understanding. My goal was to strengthen their cognitive skills and enrich the overall quality of literature learning in the target language. Qualitative data were collected using Yin's (2018) interpretive multiple-case study approach, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of eight undergraduate students enrolled in a 300-level Japanese course (novice-intermediate level by the ACTFL proficiency scale)

during the Spring 2023 semester. All participants had completed 200-level Japanese courses, were pursuing a minor in Japanese, and were raised in the United States, residing in Southern California. Ninety percent of the students expressed a strong desire to study abroad in Japan, driven by their fascination with the culture, language, and everyday life they encountered through the literature. Many shared dreams of immersing themselves in authentic Japanese settings—visiting historical sites mentioned in the texts, engaging with local communities, and experiencing firsthand the cultural nuances that had sparked their curiosity in class.

I employed the triangular data collection through surveys, interviews, and observations, and the students shared their diverse experiences and perspectives on the Japanese literature course. The findings revealed that intermediate learners of Japanese often needed more tailored and supportive learning materials to fully grasp the depth of the stories, and engage in higher-order thinking—comparing, analyzing, designing, and creating—based on Bloom’s Taxonomy. As they navigated these challenges, I observed a gradual transformation: students began to take more ownership of their learning, finding joy and confidence in the process. Through this journey, they not only strengthened their academic skills but also nurtured a sense of autonomy, wellbeing, and intrinsic motivation that sustained their engagement with the language and literature.

Literature Review

This section reviews studies on motivational factors (intrinsic and challenge), supplemental materials, and Bloom’s taxonomy. These frameworks inform my approach to teaching Japanese literature to American college students at the low-intermediate level. By connecting theory and practice together, I aim to illustrate how literature-based language learning can spark motivation, foster learner autonomy, and nurture cognitive growth through the students’ voices in the findings. Through the students’ voices and experiences, the study reveals how engaging with stories in the target language can become a transformative process—one that deepens both intellectual understanding and personal connection to learning.

Motivation

In my Japanese literature classes, I have observed that students show the highest engagement when they feel a sense of ownership over their learning. For instance, when they are given choices—such as selecting which story to analyze or deciding how to present their interpretations—their enthusiasm and depth of reflection noticeably increase. Students often express pride in tackling challenging texts, like Akutagawa’s *The Nose* or *Earless Hoichi*, even when the language is difficult. This sense of accomplishment and autonomy appears to foster persistence and curiosity, both hallmarks of intrinsic motivation. Witnessing their growth and confidence deepen through these moments is profoundly rewarding to me as a teacher; it reaffirms my belief in the transformative power of learner-centered education and reminds me why I am passionate about teaching literature.

Motivation plays a central role in sustaining this engagement. It can be understood as an internal condition that activates, directs, and maintains learners’ behavior (Woolfolk, 2019). Ryan and Deci (2000b) describe intrinsic motivation as engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for external rewards. Their theory aligns closely with my classroom experience: when students perceive freedom of choice and feel competent in using Japanese, their motivation and confidence grow. I observed this alignment through their reflections and classroom discussions, where students often articulated a sense of

pride and fulfillment when they successfully expressed complex ideas in Japanese. Their comments revealed that autonomy and competence were not abstract concepts but lived experiences that shaped their sense of progress and belonging in the learning community.

Educational research supports these observations. Intrinsic motivation has been shown to enhance learning, performance, and creativity (DiDomenico & Ryan, 2017) and is particularly critical in language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). Autonomy-supportive environments—those that encourage self-direction and acknowledge student perspectives—tend to increase intrinsic motivation, whereas overly controlled instruction can diminish it (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Moreover, intrinsic motivation contributes to psychological well-being (Bhat & Naik, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000c), a relationship I have also witnessed as students gain confidence and joy in expressing ideas in Japanese. In this study, I explore how students in my Japanese literature class experience and perceive intrinsic motivation, particularly as it relates to autonomy, challenge, and emotional engagement in learning through literature. Witnessing their growing curiosity, confidence, and joy in discovering meaning through Japanese texts affirmed for me the transformative power of intrinsically motivated learning.

Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning empowers students to take responsibility for their education, enhancing engagement and independence (Avazmatova, 2022). Chitashvili (2007) similarly noted that second language learners perform better when they develop autonomy. To support this, I begin each lesson by offering structured guidance—model sentences, key vocabulary, or guided reading questions—and then gradually step back as students gain confidence, while reflecting Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. In practice, this means that at the start of a lesson, I might demonstrate how to analyze a short passage, thinking aloud as I make connections between language and meaning. As students move into small-group discussions, I circulate, listening to their interpretations and asking questions that prompt deeper thinking. At the end of class, I often invite them to write a brief reflection on what strategies helped them understand the text. Through these interactions, students learn to trust their own insights, develop personalized approaches to learning, and continue building independence beyond the classroom (Zimmerman, 2002).

I further foster autonomy by offering meaningful choices tailored to my students' interests. For example, in a recent class of eight students, they selected presentation topics ranging from analyzing a particular character's moral dilemma to exploring themes of memory and loss in a short story. They also chose project formats, including group skits, written analyses, and creative visual representations, and selected literary passages that resonated with their experiences. A few students were not confident about making these decisions, unsure whether their choices were "correct," but with guidance and encouragement, they became more confident and engaged. My role is both facilitative and active: I scaffold learning, model critical thinking, guide reflection, and provide reassurance as students exercise choice, gradually shifting responsibility to them. This approach allowed the eight learners to become self-directed, confident interpreters of Japanese literature while still benefiting from structured support.

Supplemental Materials

According to New Zealand's Ministry of Education (2025), teachers should build disciplinary knowledge and use supplemental materials to enhance learning—especially in language education, where vocabulary, grammar, culture, and historical context are essential.

Studies support this: Dodd et al. (2015) found that supplementary materials increased motivation and participation, and Barzan et al. (2021) showed they improved linguistic and cultural understanding.

In my Japanese literature class, providing cultural context—such as Buddhist concepts of vanity and karma when teaching Akutagawa’s *The Nose*—deepens students’ comprehension and discussion. Following St. Olaf College’s (2025) guidelines for materials that are level-appropriate, relevant, and well-sequenced, I select literature that is both accessible and intellectually engaging. As a result, students not only strengthen their language skills but also their cultural empathy and critical thinking.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

Bloom’s Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) outlines six cognitive levels—remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create—and remains central to instructional design (World Language Classroom, 2017). In my Japanese literature course, the taxonomy guides the assignments that progress from comprehension to critical thinking:

- Remember: Vocabulary quizzes and factual questions
- Understand: Summarizing story themes
- Apply: Retelling from a new perspective
- Analyze: Interpreting lessons or commenting on key lines
- Evaluate: Predicting or justifying alternative endings
- Create: Writing an original continuation or adaptation.

This framework enables students, even with limited Japanese proficiency, to develop deeper analytical and creative engagement through scaffolding and language support. Their voices and creative analytical approaches are described in the findings.

ACTFL Guidelines and Cognitive Development

According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (2012), intermediate readers comprehend familiar sentences but struggle with complex or abstract texts—reflecting the proficiency of students in my Japanese literature class. Accordingly, instruction follows Bloom’s (Krathwohl, 2002) taxonomy, moving from lower-order skills (remember, understand) to higher-order skills (apply, analyze, evaluate, create). Aligning ACTFL (2012) standards with Bloom’s framework fosters both linguistic comprehension and critical, creative thinking. Ultimately, this approach supports the study’s goal: to show how learning Japanese literature enhances motivation, autonomy, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness.

Course Description of Japanese Literature

This section outlines the objectives, outcomes, and assessments of the Japanese literature examined in this study.

Course Description

This Japanese literature course for third-year students introduces modern and classical works, such as *The Tale of Heike*, *The Tale of Genji* (manga version), and *Earless Hoichi*. Conducted in both Japanese and English, it focuses on vocabulary, reading comprehension, literary analysis, and writing. Completion of 200-level Japanese is required. This is my first time teaching this course.

Learning Objectives (LO)

The learning objectives of the course (LO1-LO7) emphasize vocabulary and grammar development, summarizing and analyzing stories, understanding historical and cultural contexts, interpreting literary themes, and expressing ideas through discussion, presentation, and writing.

Assessments

- **Homework:** Q&A, 5W1H questions (what, who, when, why, when and how) reflections, and grammar exercises (Bloom: Understand-Evaluate).
- **Tests:** Story comprehension (LO1, LO3, LO6; Bloom: Understand).
- **Quizzes:** Vocabulary (LO1; Bloom: Remember).
- **Projects 1 & 2:** Integrative tasks covering LO1-LO7 (Bloom: Remember-Create).

These activities align with Bloom's Taxonomy to build linguistic, analytical, and cultural competencies in the target language.

Method

Participants

The study involved eight undergraduate students pursuing a minor in Japanese. They had completed the 200-level Japanese courses and were enrolled in a 300-level Japanese course (novice-intermediate level) during the Spring 2023 semester. All participants were raised in the United States and resided in Southern California. Ninety percent of them would like to study abroad in Japan. The course, "Japanese Literature," was an elective for their minor. As part of their Japanese program, they used *Genki I* for the 100-level courses and *Genki II* for the 200-level courses. (Please refer to Appendix A for the detailed grades.) The table below summarizes students' performance to illustrate their learning outcomes. It is included here to highlight the extent of their progress and to provide a clearer picture of how the instructional approach influenced their achievement.

Table 1. Results of Students' Achievements

	Students	Final Grade	5 Tests (content)	Quizzes (vocabulary only)	Project 1	Project 2	T or F quizzes
1	Amy	90%	92%	90%	91%	0-%	92%
2	Ariana	83%	78%	80%	80%	81%	83%
3	Akemi	90%	85%	80%	91%	89%	92%
4	Connor	81%	78%	7%	82%	83%	85%
5	Jennifer	98%	99%	99%	99%	98%	100%
6	James	99%	98%	98%	99%	98%	100%
7	Jim	82%	82%	89%	82%	82%	82%
8	Tom	99%	99%	100%	98%	99%	100%

Note: Table 1 shows the results of students' final grades, tests, quizzes, and three projects.

Data Collection

The research employed an interpretive multiple-case study (Yin, 2018), focusing on the experiences and perspectives of eight students at the 300-level of Japanese. Participants shared their divergent experiences and perspectives on the Japanese literature course

through surveys and interviews at the end of the course in the 2023 spring semester. I also analyzed the data through observations and student discussions during the course. An interpretive multiple-case study was deemed an appropriate research approach to examine shared and divergent experiences. Additionally, thematic coding, a qualitative method, was used to analyze data and gather common contextual concerns. Triangulation was employed for validity (Bazeley, 2013), involving the collection of information through various methods and cross-referencing data obtained through different methods. I was an instructor as well as the investigator for this study.

Supplementary Materials

In each class I used Powerpoint presentations to introduce vocabulary, grammar notes, cultural information, and relevant YouTube videos related to the readings. Challenging vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar points were highlighted in the presentations to enhance comprehension. Additionally, I provided supplementary materials and uploaded them to the campus portal for students to prepare and review. Each class was also recorded, allowing students to revisit the lessons as needed. The following list outlines the flow of my lessons, presented in bullet points to clearly illustrate the step-by-step scaffolding process that supported students' learning trajectories. Each stage is built upon the previous one to facilitate progressive learning:

- PowerPoint slides that include the challenging words, phrases, and cultural aspects;
- Vocabulary worksheet that includes kanji (Chinese characters) with English translations;
- Grammar notes with examples;
- Cultural notes in English that explain Japanese culture, such as the samurai spirit;
- YouTube videos that provide stories both in English and Japanese with subtitles; When kanji (Chinese characters) lack furigana, I add it myself and create a vocabulary list along with an English translation (See Appendix – Sample of Video). Furigana—small hiragana placed above kanji—assists with pronunciation. In class, we read together as a group or individually, focusing on challenging sections that involve vocabulary, sentence structure, and aspects of Japanese culture; and
- English translations of Japanese literature were provided.

Summarizing the Procedures

This section describes the procedures for ethics, data collection, and data analysis providing transparency and clarity about how the study was conducted. The research took place between February and May 2023, during which I obtained informed consent from all participants prior to their involvement. I employed a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018), which allowed for an in-depth examination of students' experiences and perspectives. I used surveys, interviews, and classroom observations as the primary data collection methods, focusing on three key factors: learning materials, motivation, and cognitive skills. I transcribed all interviews verbatim to ensure accuracy. Then, I organized the collected data systematically and analyzed them according to emergent themes. I selected this study design because it enables a rich, detailed exploration of individual student voices while also allowing for cross-case comparisons, which helps identify patterns and variations in learning experiences.

Findings

Learning Materials

All the students in this study emphasized the usefulness of vocabulary and grammar notes for comprehending the content of the stories. This activity was particularly true for lower-level proficiency students like Ariana, who said:

To begin with, a challenge that I faced throughout the literature course was the proper grammar points and vocabulary that were used throughout the course. In some cases, I would misuse a grammar point that was provided throughout the lessons, but as we went over the grammar points throughout the PowerPoint slides, I was able to grasp the concept behind these grammar points.

Even higher-level proficiency students, such as James, Jennifer, and Tom, found vocabulary worksheets and grammar notes particularly helpful for understanding classical tales written in an older style of Japanese. For example, they noted the use of *nari*—a formal verb from classical and samurai-era Japanese—compared to *desu*, the polite copula used in modern Japanese. James, an “A” student, shared, “When I read the unlearned classical words, I got totally lost. However, with the supplemental materials, I started to grasp the story step by step.” He specifically requested a review of challenging vocabulary, including masculine and feminine terms, as well as the samurai-related terminology, which had not been covered in their 200-level Japanese course. Preparing the supplementary materials took extra time, but it was rewarding to see James’s comprehension of the story improve. These observations highlight the importance of supplemental language materials in enhancing comprehension at this level, particularly when dealing with historical or classical texts.

All the students expressed enjoyment in the variety of stories, particularly folklores. Ariana commented: “I really enjoyed the variety of Japanese folklore and stories that we covered during the course that show morals, Japanese customs, cultures, and way of thinking.” Additionally, several students reported gaining new insights into Japanese culture through the stories. For instance, Jennifer mentioned:

Aside from the wonderful stories, I like that I was able to learn more about the culture of Japan through them. For example, I learned that when there is a rain shower while the sun is out, there will be a fox wedding, and you have to smoke cigarettes to remove their illusions. It is a very curious thing.

These statements underscore the importance of effective and appropriate instructional materials in both content and language supplements for a better understanding of the stories (St. Olaf College, 2025). Curiosity is a higher order of learning. Tom’s feedback further emphasized the significance of language-related supplemental materials to comprehend the contents:

To begin with, a challenge that I faced throughout the literature course was the proper grammar points? And vocabulary that was used throughout the course. In some cases, I would misuse a grammar point that was provided throughout the lessons, but as we went over the grammar points throughout the PowerPoint slides, I was able to grasp the concept behind these grammar points.

This statement showed that appropriate supplements, including PowerPoint slides, grammar points, and vocabulary, are vital for understanding the story.

Tom also highlighted the importance of assignments in developing Japanese language skills:

I liked everything about this course, from the vocabulary worksheets to creating our own stories/retelling stories, and the other assignments as well. I enjoyed all of these assignments because I was able to engage my skills for the language throughout these assignments, and it furthermore deepened my interest in learning Japanese. I learned a lot from the literature courses and culture course [sic], as I was able to get a better understanding of the Japanese language through literature (such as stories, vocabulary worksheets, and so on).

His statement confirmed the importance of assignments related to both language and content tasks for gaining greater insight into Japan's lifestyle through culture and literature courses. Aligning assignments with readings and activities was suggested for teachers to create better outcomes (Center for Instruction and Research Technology, n.d.).

Alignment of activities and assignments becomes more critical when students study classical tales. When learning classical Japanese, students delved into samurai culture and old-fashioned ways of thinking. James shared:

When I read the classical tales such as *The Tale of Heike* and *The Tale of Genji*, I lost my mind and could not understand the stories at all since there are classical Japanese I have never studied. I suggest focusing on difficult vocabulary and grammars [sic] in the stories, especially classical stories. However, I learned so much from *The Tale of Heike* and *Earless Hoichi*, such as samurai culture and customs, like the way they talked, the way they viewed honor, and the way that they lived their lives.

Even though James is an "A" student, he had a challenging time comprehending the classical stories and requested more Japanese language supplements to align with the tales. Students unfamiliar with old Japanese faced challenges learning gender-related expressions. However, vocabulary worksheets and grammar notes were very useful for understanding the stories. Tom reported:

I had the challenge that I faced throughout the literature course was the proper grammar point and vocabulary that was used throughout the course. In some cases, I would misuse a grammar point that was provided throughout the lessons.

The intentional sequencing of easier to more difficult stories, especially using visual aids like YouTube for the easier ones and omitting them for the difficult ones, was noted. Akemi reported: "Started off [sic] the easy stories and moved from difficult to easy ones. Therefore, it was easier to follow the course." This statement aligns with the review of St. Olaf College (2025, January 10), which states that one of the qualities of effective instructional materials is whether the materials are appropriately sequenced.

Visual and Translation Assistance

A few students highlighted the importance of translation and visuals in comprehending content and utilizing the Japanese language, as observed by Ariana. She remarked: "I liked the stories that came with an English translation because I was able to check my work and match it with my translations." This practice became especially relevant when studying two classical tales (*The Tale of Heike* and *The Tale of Genji*), where the supplementation of English translation proved more useful. Ariana further explained that "Since I never learned old Japanese, it was very difficult to understand the classical Japanese stories. Besides, there were not many visuals, such as YouTube, to illustrate classical stories." Expressing a need

for English translation, she continued, “Besides, there are many difficult kanji. I really got lost. I wish there were an English translation.”

In interviews about how they approached creating accurate Japanese sentences, the students revealed that the limited availability of tutoring sessions led them to rely on online translation tools such as DeepL and Google Translate. However, I advised them in advance that while Google Translate can be helpful for checking vocabulary, it is less reliable for sentence structures. I suggest that DeepL provides more accurate sentence translations.

Ariana valued visual aids, such as YouTube, in conjunction with written language. Despite expressing initial reluctance about being in the course, her Japanese language grade was 80%, as seen in quizzes. She stated, “Being able to be taught stories both in written language and visually was extremely helpful/beneficial.”

For learners with lower language proficiency levels, the provision of not only language supplemental materials, but also visual aids were deemed helpful and beneficial. Incorporating individual differences into supplemental materials is essential for engaging diverse learners. To accommodate various learning preferences, I tailored visual resources such as YouTube videos and images, written materials like handouts, and auditory content, including recordings. Preparing these materials can be time-consuming, often requiring several hours for a single lesson. Yet, watching students engage with the resources, make connections, and demonstrate understanding is deeply rewarding. It gives me a sense of fulfillment and affirmation, reminding me that the extra effort invested in meeting diverse learning needs truly enhances their learning experience.

Motivation

Fun and Interesting

In the aforementioned students’ report on various story genres, there was a notable interest in acquiring knowledge about Japanese customs, manners, and ways of thinking. The majority of students expressed their enjoyment, finding the stories both fun and interesting. Intrinsic motivations such as these are essential variables strongly associated with students’ academic performance. Despite the linguistic challenges in creating Japanese sentences, all the students reported relishing the process of retelling the stories and crafting alternative endings. Even Ariana, whose Japanese language proficiency was below a “B,” expressed that the experience was enjoyable and entertaining. Crafting new stories presents a challenge as students need to employ unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar. Creativity, identified as the highest cognitive skill in Bloom’s taxonomy, was evident in the students’ reports. These findings align with Ryan and Deci’s (2017) study, asserting that intrinsically motivated learners can undertake highly challenging tasks without external pressure, fostering creativity alongside learning, performance, and optimal development.

Integrating interest-driven and enjoyable activities, such as storytelling, into language learning enhances both linguistic competence and cognitive skills. By tapping into students’ intrinsic motivation and interest, educators can create engaging, meaningful, and compelling learning experiences that go beyond rote memorization, fostering creativity and deeper understanding.

Challenge

While students found most stories entertaining and engaging, they faced challenges with two classical tales: *The Tale of Heike* and *The Tale of Genji*. The archaic Japanese language and intricate narratives, particularly the complexities of the samurai code and terminology,

proved difficult to grasp. However, as Ryan and Deci (2017) suggest, intrinsic motivation enabled students to persist despite these challenges. Their engagement stemmed not only from enjoyment but also from the desire to overcome difficulties (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). This struggle, in turn, fostered autonomous learning.

Before finalizing their presentation scripts, I organized individual Zoom meetings to review students' Japanese. As a prerequisite, they were required to submit a first draft of their script, allowing me to assess their Japanese sentences in advance. This process enabled students to double-check their work and refine their language use. All students appreciated the individual sessions and found them highly useful for improving their scripts.

Although this was a 300-level course for novice learners, students demonstrated remarkable initiative in overcoming challenges independently, fostering a sense of autonomy and confidence in their learning. By crafting their own original stories, they engaged creatively with the material, making their learning experience more meaningful. For the final presentations, they used PowerPoint to share their stories in both Japanese and English, without the pressure of memorization. This approach reduced anxiety and encouraged authentic expression, contributing to a supportive and engaging learning environment.

When engaging with challenging activities, I observed that open-ended questions and discussions about story content in Japanese often led to silence in the classroom. To encourage active participation, I introduced paired and group discussions in both Japanese and English. While verbal discussions in Japanese remained challenging, students successfully engaged in written discussions by utilizing supplemental materials such as vocabulary lists, grammar notes, English translations, and PowerPoints, along with additional tools like videos. When students encounter difficulties, we address them together by implementing various pair and group methodologies and incorporating additional resources.

The majority of students found the supplemental materials and discussions helpful in understanding the story and Japanese culture. As an instructor, I deepened my understanding of higher-order thinking skills through a case study of dynamic classroom processes. This approach enabled students to build confidence in expressing their thoughts before submitting responses and comments in Japanese. The structured framework supported their development in Japanese language proficiency, particularly in reading comprehension, written expression, and the gradual improvement of oral communication.

Cognitive Skills in Bloom's Taxonomy

Evaluation & Comparison

Jennifer, originally from the Philippines, conducted a comparative analysis between her heritage and Japanese culture. In the realm of literature, she noted significant similarities between Japanese and non-Japanese literary works, particularly in themes and moral lessons. The prevalent theme in Japanese literature revolves around the reward for kindness and good-hearted actions, while malevolent deeds face more severe consequences.

At this cognitive level, Jennifer exhibited an unexpected comparison between her native culture and Japanese culture. Additionally, she shared a cultural belief from the Philippines, mentioning that during a rain shower while the sun is out, a mythical creature called Kapre is believed to be smoking tobacco in the trees.

Design/Creativity

All the students, including those with lower language proficiency like Ariana, expressed enjoyment in crafting and reimagining their own stories. Tom specifically highlighted his

positive experience with the course, appreciating everything from vocabulary worksheets to the creation and retelling of stories. Furthermore, students relished the freedom to shape their narratives, with Jim expressing satisfaction in allowing students to change story elements and create their own endings, all while learning some Japanese in the process.

The students' enjoyment of this creative freedom aligns with Ryan and Deci's (2000b) assertion that autonomy and choice enhance intrinsic motivation by providing a sense of autonomy. Interviews revealed that students actively sought and utilized tools like DeepL, an online translation tool, to construct meaningful and accurate Japanese sentences independently. This learning practice indicates that freedom of choice enhances intrinsic motivation, fostering autonomous learning.

Despite facing language challenges, Jim, who received a final grade of "B-", still found joy in creating his own story, which supports Ryan and Deci's (2000b) claim that intrinsically motivated learners can tackle challenging tasks with enthusiasm. Surprisingly, even students with lower Japanese proficiency, such as Jim, expressed enjoyment in the freedom to create story endings. Jennifer and James went a step further, suggesting the creation of entire stories, aligning with Ryan and Deci's (2000c) research on the benefits of less control in learning. On the contrary, Ariana struggled with Project 2, where students needed to rewrite the ending of the stories and did not enjoy the creativity involved in crafting her own story. Her frequent attendance at tutoring sessions reflected the challenges posed by complex vocabulary and new kanji that underscored the importance of supplementing language materials, especially for students with lower proficiency levels.

I observed that Conner perceived the projects as "a little easy" despite receiving a grade of B-, which stood in contrast to other students who found the classical tales challenging. This discrepancy may reflect a degree of overconfidence, though the exact reasons remain unclear. I found it insightful to see how students' perceptions of difficulty varied, highlighting the importance of differentiating instruction to meet diverse learning needs. Additionally, several students expressed enjoyment in listening to their peers' presentations, suggesting that the activity not only supported individual creativity but also fostered a sense of community and engagement within the classroom.

Autonomous Learning

Using the scaffolding techniques and supplementary materials I provided, I guided my students to understand the content and develop their Japanese language skills. I remember Tom sharing that he initially struggled with grammar and vocabulary, sometimes misusing points we had covered. However, by working through the PowerPoint slides I had prepared, he gradually grasped the concepts. He reflected:

To begin with, a challenge that I faced throughout the literature course was the proper grammar points and vocabulary that were used throughout the course. In some cases, I would misuse a grammar point that was provided throughout the lessons, but as we went over the grammar points throughout the PowerPoint slides, I was able to grasp the concept behind these grammar points.

Watching Tom work through this challenge reinforced for me the value of fostering autonomous learning. I was struck by how he actively engaged with the materials, reflected on his errors, and corrected them independently. Rather than relying solely on my feedback, he took the initiative to deepen his understanding. Observing this process firsthand reminded me of the importance of creating opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning, to

reflect critically, and to apply new knowledge—principles I now see as central to cultivating both competence and confidence in my students.

In teaching *The Tale of Heike*, I observed clear development in my students' learning, as reflected in Conner's reflections. To guide them toward higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and inference, I implemented a series of structured activities. I provided an English translation of the story, compiled by Donald Keene (2001) from the *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, and uploaded supplemental materials—including a vocabulary list, grammar notes, and cultural notes, such as explanations of the samurai spirit—to the campus portal for students to review at their own pace.

In class, we discussed ye/no questions and Wh-questions in both English and Japanese. For example, I asked students to consider: "What would you do in this situation?" referring to the old samurai who killed the young opponent. Students also submitted written responses as homework, allowing me to see how they processed and applied their understanding individually.

One student, James, shared his experience with this scaffolding approach: "At first, I felt overwhelmed by the classical tale because of the unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence structures. With the help of supplemental materials, I was able to understand the content step by step." Witnessing his gradual comprehension reminded me of the value of scaffolding instruction and of providing multiple avenues for students to engage with challenging texts.

For the final project, students were tasked with either creating their own stories or altering the endings of stories studied in class. Before meeting with me individually, they submitted a draft along with a vocabulary list. During our meetings, I provided feedback on both linguistic and cultural aspects. After making revisions, they presented their work in class.

I found that students valued the individual meetings particularly highly, as these sessions gave me the opportunity to address their strengths and areas for growth directly and to guide them in refining their presentations. Providing individualized feedback allowed me to support students with different learning styles more effectively, tailoring suggestions to their specific needs. Through this scaffolding approach, I observed a noticeable boost in their confidence—not only in their understanding of the content but also in their Japanese language skills—which became evident in both their presentations and written assignments. I was especially encouraged to see how creating their own stories seemed to spark genuine engagement and a sense of ownership and responsibility in learning (Kise, 2020; Theesfeld, 2021). Most students, except those with lower proficiency, shared that they would enjoy doing this type of project again because it was fun, which was gratifying to hear and reinforced the value of creative, student-centered learning.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of motivation, learning materials, and higher cognitive skills based upon Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), on intermediate-level students in a Japanese literature class, with the aim of enhancing their cognitive abilities and improving the literature course in the target language. According to ACTFL (2012) proficiency guidelines for intermediate-level readers, students at this stage comprehend plain and simple sentences in familiar everyday situations but may struggle with the understanding of detailed texts and the sequence of stories. The findings of this study underscored the significance of supplemental materials, encompassing both language (vocabulary and grammar) and culture to facilitate a deeper understanding of the content. In addition, historical backgrounds in both English and Japanese are necessary to comprehend the content of the stories. I observed that

preparatory knowledge in English supports students' development of understanding at this level so that they can analyze the content in depth.

Despite the challenges associated with projects demanding the highest cognitive levels, such as design and creativity, students expressed enjoyment in creating stories, revealing an intrinsic motivation for this type of project. This outcome aligns with Ryan and Deci's (2017) assertion that students are more willing to tackle difficulties when they find the learning process enjoyable. The study's results suggest that providing appropriate supplemental materials is crucial for using the scaffolding instruction for success in the literature course in the target language, fostering higher cognitive skills. The inclusion of supplementary materials not only helped address the challenges effectively, but also contributed to students' enjoyment in the creation of stories.

Paying close attention to each student is essential in this literature class for this level of Japanese class. I observed that individual meetings significantly benefited students by enhancing their writing, comprehension, and creativity. However, conducting individual sessions for final projects can be challenging in larger classes due to time constraints and instructional limitations. Fortunately, with only eight students in this class, I was able to hold individual sessions, providing them with personalized guidance.

Teaching Japanese literature to American students for the first time has been a rewarding experience. I have observed that engaging with Japanese literature fosters a strong sense of community both in the classroom and beyond. Through structured discussions and shared reflections, supported by scaffolding instruction, students have deeply connected with the texts and with one another. This process has not only enhanced their cognitive skills but also deepened their understanding of Japanese culture, allowing them to expand their perspectives beyond their own country. As they recognize their own learning growth, they experience a sense of achievement that strengthens their motivation. Ultimately, this journey has enriched them both intellectually and personally.

Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Ellen Head and Jim Ronald of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.*)

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Appendix

Sample of Video

Slide of PowerPoint with vocabulary list with furigana and English translation

Slide 2:

Izanagi (イザナギ) or Izanaki (イザナキ) is a creator deity (kami) in Japanese mythology. He and his sister-wife Izanami are the last of the seven generations of primordial deities that manifested after the formation of heaven and earth.



よみのくに: the world of the dead
 もどります: return
 けがれます: be corrupted, become unclean
 きよめます: purify

黄泉の国から戻ったイザナギは、「穢れた国だった。体を清めなければ…」と言って、川へ行きました。服を脱いでいるとき、時間や道の神様がたくさん生まれました。

単語	読み仮名	英語
イザナギ		See below.
黄泉の国	よみのくに	The world of the dead
戻ります	もどります	To return
脱ぐ	ぬぐ	To take off
けがれます		To be corrupted; to become unclean
清めます	きよめます	To be purified

Samples of Tests and Assignments

Sample Assignment

源氏物語: 夕顔 (The Tale of Genji, Yugao chapter).

p.40 ~ 44

内容質問 (Content questions)

Answer the following in Japanese.

質問1) はだれをいにいきましたか。

質問2) にかかいてありましたか。

質問3) だれが女の人に歌をあげましたか。

質問4) 女の人とはどんな人ですか。

単語の問題 (vocabulary question)

Fill in the blanks with the most appropriate vocabulary.

- 1 のがだったので _____ いにでかけました。
- 2 しいはなだ、_____ もらってきてくれないか。
- 3 _____ 一度あってみたいものだ。
- 4 わたくしのように _____ がひくくこどもまでいる女に。
- 5 あなたはやさしくて _____ い人だ。

A. ぜひ B. _____ D. い E. おくゆかし F. _____

Sample test

Test: Earless Hoichi

(I) Vocabulary

Fill in the blanks with the most appropriate vocabulary.

(1) Slide 2~5

1. のはをいて、からへを_____。
2. _____をめたは _____でにました。
3. のを_____しました。
4. はをんでで_____させました。

A. _____ B. げました C. _____ D. _____

(2) Slide 6~11

- ① は _____になっておりませんでした。
- ② 芳一はびっくりしてすぐに_____ができませんでした。
- ③ はだとわかりましたから、_____ませんでした。
- ④ 芳一はもしかしたら、えらい_____の家へいくかもしれないと思いました。
- ⑤ _____がいのしでした。
- ⑥ はにわれて_____しました。

A. _____ B. れ C. _____
D. _____ E. _____ F. _____

(3) Slide 12~ 14

1. は、のいのをい_____。
2. のれがかわって、に_____になりました。
3. は_____ににされました。
4. _____すばらしいとはいませんでした。

A. _____ B. めました C. これほど D. _____

(4) Slide 18 ~ 21

- ① おをかけばおまえから_____はえなくなるはずです
- ② _____にをしたり、いたりしてはいけません。
- ③ いつものように侍の_____が近づきました。
- ④ 芳一は_____ましたが、をしませんでした。
- ⑤ 芳一の_____はひきちがれました。

A. _____ B. _____ C. _____ D. え E. _____

(II) Select one question each from (1) ~ (5) and answer in complete sentences in Japanese.

(1) Slide 2~5

: はだれをいて、をげましたか。

: たってから、がおきましたか。

: はをしましたか。

: はがでしたか。

(2) Slide 6~11

質問1: はどこでをいていましたか。

2: のにきたはだれですか。

3: はどうしてとにいったのですか。

4: は平家のどの場面を歌いましたか。

(3) Slide 12 ~ 17

① はどんなをいめましたか。

② どうしてがになりましたか。

③ はにをしましたか。

④ はどこでをしましたか。

⑤ 芳一はだれにをかせていましたか。

(4) Slide 18 ~ 21

① はのどこにおをかきましたか。

② 芳一はどこでをっていましたか。

③ 怖ろしいはだれのですか。

④ はのどこをもぎ取りましたか。

(5) Slide 22 ~ 25

① のからがダラダラれていましたか。

② はをするのをらせていましたか。

③ どんながのをききにきましたか。

(III) Organize sentences to accord with the story. Write the numbers next to each statement consecutively.

① がで、のをいっていると、かがからるがしました。____

② くからやおちが、のをきにました。____

③ はいました、「をれてました!」____

④ のはのを、きちぎりました。____

⑤ はので、のいのをいました。____

5 はののにおをきました。____

⑦ のくに、という、がえないがんでいました。____

(IV) Select four from the list below and write meaningful sentences in Japanese using the indicated structures.

(1) ～ながら

In the tale: のはき**ながら**こたえました。

(2) ～させました

In the tale: で**させました**。

(3) ～かもしれない

In the tale: いのにくの**かもしれない**。

(4) ～はじめます

In the tale: ののいのをいめました。

(5) ～とは思いませんでした。

In the tale: これほどらしいとは思いませんでした。

(6) ～たら

In the tale: もしい**たら**、おまえはされる。

(7) ～ば

In the tale: おをけば、おまえはからえなくなるはずです。

(8) ～よう: Volitional form

In the tale: にみせよう。

Sample project 1 - Change the ending of Princess Kaguya

Students present the story with created ending using PowerPoint.

最後{さいご}のプレゼンテーションでは、かぐや姫の話{はなし}を選{えら}びます。スタジオジブリは最近{さいきん}その映画を作{つく}りました。日本で人気{にんき}のある話{はなし}は、地球{ちきゅう}に住{す}む地球外{ちきゅうがい}の王女{おうじょ}についてです。シーンを追加{ついか}する/終{お}わりを変更{へんこう}します。私の考{かんが}えは、王女が月から戻{もど}ってきて、彼女{かのじょ}の友人{ゆうじん}や家族{かぞく}を訪{たず}ねることです。彼女{かのじょ}は特別{とくべつ}な泡{あわ}で彼女{かのじょ}の家族{かぞく}を彼女{かのじょ}の月{つき}の王国{おうこく}に連{つ}れて行きます。何{なん}らかの理由{りゆう}で、映画監督{かんとく}になりたかった。悲{かな}しいことに、シーンを徹底的{てっていてき}に見直{みなお}して作業{さぎょう}する時間{じかん}はありません。

English:

For the final presentation, I chose the story Princess Kaguya. Studio Ghibi made a movie of it recently. The popular Japanese story is about an extraterrestrial princess living on planet earth. I am going to add extra scene/change the ending of the original story. My idea would be that the Princess comes back from the moon and visits her friends and family. And she brings her family to her moon kingdom by a special bubble. For some reason, I wanted to be a director. Sadly, I do not have feasible time to work and review the scenes thoroughly.

Creative Speaking: A Practice-Related Review of “Creativity Through Inquiry Dialogue” (Chappell, 2016) in *Creativity in Language Teaching* (Jones & Richards, 2016)¹

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This practice-related review explores the link between creativity and language learning and teaching, drawing on *Creativity in Language Teaching* (Jones & Richards, 2016) and especially Chappell's (2016) concept of creativity through inquiry dialogue. The author expands on the theoretical framework behind this concept in order to provide the reader with a clearer understanding of how dialogue can be differentiated from other kinds of classroom speech due to five key qualities that it possesses: collectiveness, reciprocity, supportiveness, cumulation, and purposefulness (Alexander 2008b). Of these, the fourth quality of cumulation is particularly highlighted for its importance to inquiry and creative expression. The author then provides illustrations of these concepts from personal experience as a language learner and teacher, to illuminate how this sort of “creative speaking” might facilitate language acquisition and learner development. The review concludes with three suggestions for everyday practice which may facilitate this sort of creative dialogue in the TESOL classroom.

本実践的書評は、創造性と言語学習・教育の関連を探るものである。Jones & Richards (2016) の『Creativity in Language Teaching』、とりわけ Chappell (2016) が提唱する探究的対話を通じた創造性という概念に焦点を当てる。著者は、対話が他の教室での発話と区別されるのかについて読者の理解を深めるため、この概念の背景にある理論的枠組みを展開している。その区別の根拠として、Alexander (2008b) による対話の5つの重要な特質である、集合性、相互性、支持性、累積性、目的性を挙げている。これらの中で、4番目の累積性は、探究と創造的表現にとって重要であるとして特に強調されている。著者は、言語学習者および教師としての個人的経験に基づく事例を提示することで、「クリエイティブ・スピーキング」がいかに言語習得と学習者の成長を促進し得るかについて例示する。最後に、TESOL (英語教授法) の教室においてこのような創造的対話を促進するための日常的な実践に向けた3つの提言を行う。

Keywords

creativity, dialogic pedagogy, speaking, second language acquisition

創造性、対話型教授法、スピーキング、第二言語習得

Creativity has been an interest of mine throughout my career as a language teacher. When my lessons are more creative, it has been my intuition that the learners not only have more fun, but actually learn more language. I wanted to know why this seemed to be the case, and whether there was any research to substantiate my intuitions, so I read *Creativity in Language Teaching* (Jones & Richards, 2016b); it is my intention in this article to share what I found there. Reading this book, I was struck especially by the chapter “Creativity through Inquiry Dialogue,” which I began to link to the idea of “creative speaking,” and specifically to practices for TESOL inspired by the creative spoken arts, such as stand-up comedy and improv theatre. In what follows, I will briefly review the texts I have just outlined above, and conclude with suggestions for practices that might be useful in facilitating creative language learning and teaching.

1. R. H. Jones & J. C. Richards, Routledge, 2016. 284 pages. ISBN 9781138843653. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315730936>

Overview of Creativity in Language Teaching

In *Creativity in Language Teaching*, Richards and Jones (2016b) have collected articles from 20 teachers and researchers in order to explore why creativity might be useful in language education, as well as how it might be fostered in teaching practice, curriculum design, and teacher development. They suggest that creativity is particularly important in language teaching because creativity prepares learners to cope with the “novel and unpredictable” (Jones & Richards, 2016b, p. 2) experience of communicating with strangers in a foreign language. They note that creative teaching requires teachers to be reflective and intuitive enough to attend to what is happening in the classroom; flexible enough to make adjustments when needed; but also confident enough to trust their own knowledge and judgment (Richards & Jones, 2016a).

In practice, though, the question remains: How can I teach reflectively, intuitively, and with confidence? Or to put it another way: Is there any sort of approach or practices I can apply that will help me teach more creatively? In the chapter “Creativity through Inquiry Dialogue,” I believe I have found an answer to these sorts of practical questions. Before turning to this text, however, I would also like to reflect on my own intuitions on creativity and language learning and teaching, which I believe might dovetail usefully with the theory of creative dialogue, outlined by Chappell (2016) in his chapter.

View From Experience

At the start of this review, I noted my intuition—which I have harbored as far back as I can remember in my 20-year teaching career—that creativity is somehow crucial for language acquisition. This intuition is, for me, bound up inextricably with my more-than-20-year career as a language learner. I will describe here briefly my experience in both of these interrelated careers, with the hope that my experiences may serve as a useful example of some of the theoretical concepts described by Chappell.

My language learning career began not long after receiving my Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) in Hanoi, where I started learning Vietnamese at a university across the street from the language center where I had my first teaching post. The lessons at this university were of the old-fashioned, drill-and-repeat variety. Nonetheless, I kept showing up for years: drilling, repeating, and expectantly hoping that I would speak good Vietnamese one day.

My beliefs about language learning at that time were similar to those of many of my students: I thought that language learning was hard work, like physical exercise; and that all I had to do was just work out as hard and consistently as possible. Nowadays, I do not think those beliefs were wrong exactly, but I do think they were incomplete. Just like how there is much more to exercise than lifting with maximum intensity; for instance, the need for sufficient rest, adequate nutrition, or a positive mindset. I realized over the years that there is much more to learning to speak a foreign language than just maximizing hours of controlled practice.

Nothing made this clearer to me than my experience learning Arabic when, about a decade later, I was teaching in Saudi Arabia. Unlike Vietnamese, I made little concerted effort to learn Arabic when I moved to the country. I signed up for a course in my first few months there, but I found the squiggly script indecipherable and quickly gave up. However, to my surprise, over time, I began to develop a reputation at my language center for telling Arabic jokes that the Saudis call *samaja* (سماجة): groan-inducing puns, which are so terrible they get a laugh. In English these might be called “dad jokes;” here is a classic

example: "Do you think this is too much... or *three* much?" After a few years, I could rattle off dozens of silly jokes like this, in a pidgin of English and Saudi Arabic. What was most striking to me was that by playing around and having fun with a language I was not even trying to learn I was able—somehow—to start speaking that language, to the extent that at times I found myself having short conversations with my students in Arabic.

This experience was for me, poetic, in the Aristotelian sense: It was something I could not have imagined beforehand, but in retrospect cannot imagine happening any other way (Owen, 1961). It has also strongly informed my teaching: It has become my practice to foreground fun and creativity in my own lesson plans wherever possible, as it has been my experience that lessons which are boring and uncreative, no matter how potentially useful, are usually forgotten. After reading Chappell's "Creativity through Inquiry Dialogue" chapter, I believe that I have found a theoretical framework that might help us understand why learning and teaching in this sort of atmosphere of playfulness, humor, and creativity leads to the acquisition of language.

Review: Creativity Through Inquiry Dialogue

In "Creativity through Inquiry Dialogue," Chappell (2016) outlines how we might teach speaking creatively through an approach which he terms "inquiry dialogue." Chappell is referring specifically to Robin Alexander's theory of dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2008b). It may be useful to expand briefly on this pedagogical theory in order for us to better understand what Chappell means by inquiry dialogue, and how this sort of dialogue might relate to creativity in language learning.

Dialogic pedagogy originated in a case study of classroom talk carried out in England, France, India, Russia, and the United States over several years (Alexander, 2001). What emerged from that study was that it is the quality rather than the quantity of talk, which correlated most noticeably to improved learning outcomes. Alexander calls this kind of high-quality classroom talk "inquiry dialogue" and defines it as being:

1. Collective (i.e., everyone has an opportunity to speak);
2. Reciprocal (i.e., speaker(s) and listener(s) take turns speaking and listening to each other);
3. Supportive (i.e., mistakes and tangents are welcomed rather than shut down);
4. Cumulative (i.e., what is said next is linked to what has been said before);
5. Purposeful (i.e., the talk aims towards a particular end-goal).

(Alexander, 2008b, pp. 112-113)

It is the fourth quality of cumulation, of "mutual guiding and prompting, where each [speaker] builds on the others' contributions" (Chappell, 2016, p. 139) that Alexander and Chappell identify as the most crucial to dialogue (Alexander, 2008a).

Teachers often encourage their learners to speak and listen to each other, collectively and reciprocally. Many teachers create a supportive atmosphere in the classroom, and most classroom talk at least begins with some sort of purpose in mind. However, Alexander (2008c) suggests that the talk in many classrooms is rarely if ever cumulative: Learners and teachers often have the experience that they are talking *at* each other, rather than *to* or *with* each other.

Noticing this distinction between talking-at and talking-to was also critical to me in my own development as a language teacher. Early in my career, whenever the learners spoke, I would often say something like "I understand" or "I see" after every student's utterance. I said these phrases because I had been trained to say something supportive whenever students spoke. I rarely said much more than "I see" because I had also been trained to

keep teacher talk to a minimum. I didn't realize how this might make learners feel like they were talking *at* their teacher until one of them, one day, made a joke: "Teacher... What do you see?" As everyone giggled, something clicked for me: There is a world of difference between someone telling you "I see" and feeling seen. This is the difference between what Alexander (2008c) terms "mere conversation" and meaningful dialogue, as he suggests, without meaningful dialogue, there is little room for curiosity, surprise, or creativity. And consequently, there is little room for learning.

Chappell applies Alexander's (2008a) theory to TESOL by suggesting that talk which is not cumulative limits language learning. Chappell suggests that, in the TESOL classroom, such non-cumulative talk often falls into a cycle of Imitation-Response-Feedback (IRF) (Chappell, 2016; Lemke, 1991). Instead of building on what emerges organically, this sort of classroom talk is directed as quickly as possible to the target language and the answer key. Chappell provides an example of this, where two students and a teacher check their comprehension of a listening text:

R: And what was the topic about?

L: I think I think it sounds like it make a lot of people er people thought that the earth was being invade

R: invaded

L: invaded by aliens

R: Uhu

L: What do you think?

R: I think it's two reasons one because of the broadcast because of the sound of the broadcast it seemed real

L: (nodding head) hm hm

R: the story the drama that was played was very short

L: Uhu

R: and the second, at the time world politic the Europeans was starting to join World War II . . . so the people seems insecurity

L: (nodding head) Hm. Hmm.

T: OK. Let's have some answers. (Chappell 2016, p. 138)

Chappell invites us to compare this with a very similar talk, but where cumulation—rather than "some answers"—is guiding the conversation:

T: What do you think about these people and their life?

S1: I think they falling in love

(Group laughter)

T: Falling in love. OK. So maybe what, not married yet?

Ss: No. Not yet (in unison)

T: So I wonder. They still love each other. They're not fighting yet.

Ss: (Group laughter)

S6: Maybe fighting already

S5: And the guy that man asks for maybe asks for one more chance.

S4: Forgive me.

(Group laughter)

T: I'm sorry. I won't do it again.

(Group laughs loudly)

S1: Maybe they are not a couple

S2: Det det

T: Det

S3: signals circles with hand

S2: Deting

T: Dating. They're dating. OK. Do you think they're working or students?

S2: University.

T: University.

S5: How about lady is a student and man is a teacher?

(Group laughs loudly)

T: I don't I don't think so because usually the

S5: Yeah she looks young (group laughter)

T: yeah but the problem is that usually the teachers are more handsome than this

(Group laughter and groans) (Chappell, 2016, p. 140)

In the first talk, the learners play a version of what Alexander (2001) calls the game of "guess-what's-in-the-teacher's-mind." Neither the teacher nor the learners engage with what their interlocutors are actually saying about aliens or World War II. Instead, all of them are just waiting to hear someone say the correct answer. Nothing surprising happens in this talk. Therefore, why would anyone listen, most especially the teacher, who has quite possibly listened to this exact same talk many times in other lessons? The poet Robert Frost (1939)

once wrote: “No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader” (p. 1). I would suggest a similar formulation when teaching language: no surprise for the teacher, no surprise for the learners.

In the second talk, by contrast, we can see surprises emerging and being engaged with at almost every turn. The talk is noticeably funnier: Both the learners and teacher get in a few jokes. Humorousness is often an emergent quality of inquiry dialogue: The teacher and learners take turns engaging with and inquiring about what the others have said, and so they laugh, because what the other has to say is often not what they expected.

This is why an ethos of inquiry dialogue can facilitate creativity. The teacher and learners in this example could not have known where the conversation would go when it started. It is my suggestion that this sort of dialogue could also be called “creative speaking,” because a very similar ethos can be found in the creative arts. Cumulation is the most well-known rule of improv theatre: In order for the show to go on, the actors must always say “Yes, and...” to whatever starts emerging on the stage (Kaufman, 2024).

Creative Dialogue in Practice, or: Creative Speaking

The question which I would like to turn to now is: Just how might we apply this to everyday practice? I would like to suggest in the following section two routines and one specific activity that have facilitated this kind of talk in my own teaching practice.

Unprompted Talks & Recapping

I use the term “unprompted talks” to refer to a form of activity that I learned early on in my career, at the institution where I worked in Vietnam. There our learners studied for a foundation year before continuing on to undergraduate or graduate studies overseas. In an unprompted talk, students would be given one minute to prepare a one-minute talk about a topic, such as, “Toys,” a prompt, or, “Talk about a time when you had a problem using technology,” or an argument, such as, “Climate change is the most important issue in the world today. Explain why you disagree.” Students would then pair up and spend one minute each talking to, or perhaps at each other.

I would suggest these sorts of talks can be specifically framed in two ways to benefit the development of an atmosphere of creativity and dialogue. First, unprompted talks should be routine: At least one talk should be included in every single lesson. This routine can be further emphasized by encouraging learners to keep an unprompted talk diary, recording what topics they talked about in each English lesson.

By making this kind of talk a routine, there are obviously more opportunities for speaking, and therefore more opportunities to develop learners’ spoken confidence in a *collective* and *supportive* atmosphere of reciprocal conversation. However, one might reasonably ask whether these sorts of unprompted talks by themselves would embody the other aspects of inquiry dialogue, which crucially relate to creativity: *cumulation* and *purposefulness*. This is where *recapping* (Huang, 2019)—the second key technique of this practice—comes into play.

After the learners have finished speaking with each other, there are many ways to close out this sort of activity. Early on in my own career, I would often call on a learner or two and ask them to share with the class what they talked about. I would suggest that this typical wind-down question can be reframed in one crucial way, by asking: “What did *your partner* talk about?” By encouraging learners to recap what they just heard, rather than repeat what they just said. I have found the nature of this entire activity is subtly but profoundly shifted, and the other aspects of inquiry dialogue almost immediately become relevant.

Recapping what someone just told someone else requires *reciprocity*: Listening to the other person is a necessary requirement to successfully rephrasing what they just spoke about. Moreover, inevitably—even among L1 speakers—we tend to make errors when recapping what another person has said: We misremember details, misunderstand intentions, and misconstrue nuances of language. Repairing these “misses” between what one partner said and the other partner heard is a natural way of creating the links, which make cumulative and meaningful interactions. Often, the first time I invite students to recap an unprompted talk, the listening partner will begin to fidget, or shake their head, or make a face as they listen, and this is where I will gently invite them to jump in, to add corrections, or fill in missing details. Sometimes, the recapper, now listening, might disagree and attempt to correct these corrections. As the teacher, I (and the learners) may feel it is my job to step in to clear things up; but this sort of back-and-forth between “No, that’s not what I said” and “No, that’s not what that means,” but I would suggest (and would encourage my learners to consider) that the purpose of these recapping interactions is not determining who is right, but rather discovering what we might learn while we are engaged in a creative speaking process of getting the story straight.

Beginning Every Class With a Joke

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Washington in Seattle, a professor told me that the Talmud, the ancient Hebrew book of wisdom, states that every class should begin with a joke (this was itself possibly a joke.) In my own experience, telling and understanding jokes is another way in which teachers can create opportunities for creative speaking, particularly for learners at more advanced levels who may find themselves stuck at the intermediate plateau. I would suggest that this is because telling and understanding jokes is quite possibly one of the most difficult things to do in a second language (Ahn, 2016). Moreover, jokes, almost by definition, possess what Chappell calls the “subverting function” of inquiry dialogue: They shift the tenor of the conversation, opening it up to the unexpected (Chappell, 2016, p. 139). Thus, what follows is my own suggestions towards what might be called inquiry dialogue through stand-up comedy.

The first joke that the teacher tells will need to be carefully chosen to be at or near the learners’ level. Jokes that rely on onomatopoeia (like the one about the cow that gets on a crowded bus... “Mooooove”) have often worked well in my own practice as opening jokes.

It is possible the first joke will get no laughs. Either way, after telling the joke, the teacher can start with a recapping question focusing on gist rather than on humor, such as: “What did you hear?”

I often encourage learners to recap the joke to themselves by, first, writing their own recap for a minute or two, and then sharing what they think they heard with a partner or in groups. Much like when recapping a talk with a partner, gaps between what learners may have thought they heard and what the teacher has said may become visible. Once the gist of the joke has been established, another useful line of inquiry can be to explore why the learners thought the joke was (or wasn’t) funny.

The teacher can continue to do this opening-joke routine themselves, but I have found that the most interesting conversations begin to emerge when learners are invited to open the class with jokes of their own. I would strongly recommend that the teacher never forces learners to take on the joke-telling role unless and until they feel ready to do so. Joke-telling is not only linguistically difficult, but can often be psychologically stressful. As Chappell (2016)

and Alexander (2008a) noted above, a supportive atmosphere is crucial for the development of creative speaking and meaningful dialogue in the classroom.

Chappell also observes about dialogue in general that it is important for the teacher to be particularly mindful with jokes in the classroom. A joke, like inquiry dialogue, is almost by definition subversive: It opens up to the unexpected (Chappell, 2016, p. 139). For this reason, there is potentially a risk of the wrong joke causing unexpected harm. Cultural differences in terms of what is and is not acceptable to joke about can be considerable, so I would suggest that for any teacher thinking of adopting this practice, make sure to screen jokes before telling them in class. In monolingual contexts, consider telling any joke you would like to try out with the class to a speaker of the learners' first language, such as a patient colleague who does not mind hearing your jokes. In contexts where the learners speak different L1s, it may not be possible to try out every joke from every cultural/linguistic perspective. In either case, it is the responsibility of the teacher to be aware of the cultural norms and institutional rules relating to speech in the classroom, and ensure that any jokes remain within these boundaries. I knew of one teacher who was accused of *lèse-majesté* for joking about new traffic regulations. When in doubt, stick to silly puns and talking cows.

Conclusion

Early in my own language learning and teaching career, I developed an intuition that we learn to speak by engaging in what I have come to call "creative speaking," by playing around with the language, without the expectation or even perhaps the awareness that we are learning a language while we do so. It has been my intention in this review to follow up on this intuition by reviewing *Creativity in Language Teaching*, and particularly Chappell's (2016) chapter "Creativity through Inquiry Dialogue," which shows how a pedagogical shift towards this kind of creative dialogue can open opportunities for language learning. In this practice-related review, I have attempted to clarify Chappell's theoretical framework by drawing on my own examples and experiences, while also illustrating how this sort of dialogical approach might be applied in practice. By doing so, it is my hope that other teachers and learners may find these ideas useful in exploring how to foster creative speaking in their own learning and teaching journeys.

Review Process

This article was blind peer-reviewed by members of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.*)

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Where Creativity Meets Care: Autonomy, Wellbeing, and Identity in LDJ9

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When I first sat down with the LDJ9 manuscripts, I opened them with the kind of curiosity that always accompanies new readings and stories of practice. And when I started reading them, I felt that each contribution was speaking directly to me, in one way or another. The authors were thinking aloud, trying to make sense of themselves and their learners, and putting their researcher hat on to allow for their vulnerabilities to surface. As I moved from one article to the next, six themes kept catching my attention: creativity, autonomy, wellbeing, the teacher-researcher as a vulnerable practitioner, reflective narratives, and identity and becoming. All of these themes were profoundly intertwined; impressively, each article seemed to touch upon all of them, even if implicitly, and together all six themes formed a mosaic of what it means to teach and learn in ways that honour the human experience. This commentary is my way of responding to these engaging narratives as a fellow educator who immerses myself in them, listens carefully and empathetically, and learns from them.

Theme 1: Creativity

Contributors to this LDJ issue are willing to remain open to creativity. Cruz (2025) combines introspection and aspiration, as creativity emerges through meditation, imagination, and future-self visioning. Warabi's (2025) students become creative whilst working through the complexities of collaborative fiction writing. Creativity here is not a personal thing but a fundamentally social practice (Maley & Peachey, 2015). Then comes Cohen's (2025) exploration of creative speaking, where humour and risk-taking interplay with language learning. In fact, creativity in language classrooms is often simply the spark that empowers students to speak. Finally, Nunn's (2025) students engage in creativity through literature, not as readers taking the effort to comprehend passages, but as analysts and, pretty often, story re-tellers. This is an indication that apart from being affective, creativity can also have a cognitive function which manifests through analysis, synthesis, and understanding of texts from new angles.

Theme 2: Autonomy

LDJ9 contributors confidently show how autonomy is not solitary independence but can be highly dialogic and relational, shaped through meaningful conversation, guidance, and support of peers and teachers who function as a community. Bradley's (2025) use of ALMS (Autonomous Learning Modules) and counselling dialogues offers a very clear example of this. Students do not become autonomous by being left alone, but instead develop and improve through carefully structured conversations, reflective journals, and a supportive teacher who sees autonomy as a prerogative gained from working together with other students. Nunn (2025) illustrates the same principle from another angle: Students gain autonomy through intentional teacher scaffolding, which is achieved when modelling

critical reading, giving students choice, offering supplemental materials, and gradually removing support to increase independence. Although autonomy increases gradually, it becomes a process which is clearly appreciated by students and strengthened step by step. In Cruz's (2025) study, autonomy arises through imagining one's future self and choosing actions that bring that imagined self closer to today's complex realities of (classroom) language learning. In total, across the issue, learners become more autonomous because they are cared for and encouraged to rethink of themselves and their abilities through a new, collaborative, and interdependent lens.

Theme 3: Wellbeing

Of all the themes that I have identified, wellbeing is the one that caught my attention the most, not just because it links directly with my own area of research specialisation but because it threaded itself subtly and skilfully throughout the entire issue. Johnson's (2025) honest accounts of loss, grief, depression, panic, and subsequent healing have made visible the emotional labour that goes into teaching and that teachers so often (have to) hide. In several cases, teachers do not treat such instances as emotional labour because they have normalised them, often unconsciously, and this can be hugely detrimental to their health, wellbeing, and professional life. Accounts that are similar to Johnson's (2025) can serve as a powerful impetus for learning and cultivating empathy towards what several teachers might be going through (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). The major reflection that many teachers rarely attend to wellbeing is an uncomfortable yet familiar truth, which can incentivise us to take action and refrain from normalising stress, unmanageable workloads and/or overwork, and self-neglect (Benesch, 2018; Miller & Gkonou, 2018). Cruz's (2025) work also brings wellbeing to the fore by discussing meditation and self-compassion. Bradley (2025) reminds us that social connection is foundational in maintaining and protecting wellbeing, and Nunn shows how achievement and comprehension, when scaffolded compassionately, hold strong potential for cultivating wellbeing and motivation (Brierton & Gkonou, 2022). Taken together, the contributions to LDJ9 demonstrate that wellbeing inherently facilitates creativity and autonomy.

Theme 4: The Dual Role of the Teacher as a Vulnerable Practitioner-Researcher

This is perhaps the most distinctive theme of LDJ9 because every article reveals a teacher who dares to be vulnerable and admit to their own uncertainties, insecurities, failures, personal and professional histories, as well as hopes. In reflecting on these aspects, teaching is largely shaped as constant inquiry, which is a fundamentally human endeavour. But what is of utmost importance here and what teachers should understand is that such candid expressions of vulnerability do not weaken their claims, professionalism, and positionality as teachers. On the contrary, this subjective vulnerability gives credibility to the teachers' lived experiences and is an indication that they were willing to study and reflect on their puzzling moments – and to talk about them openly too (Gkonou & Miller, 2020).

Theme 5: Research Methodology Through Reflective, Person-Centred Narratives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014)

Throughout the present issue, teacher knowledge is generated through reflexive thematic analysis e.g., Bradley (2025), Cruz (2025), Johnson (2025); practitioner research including

Exploratory Practice e.g., Bradley (2025), Cohen (2025), Warabi, (2025); narrative inquiry and reflective writing for identity sense-making e.g., Cruz (2025), Johnson (2025); individual case study approach e.g., Nunn (2025); and data collected through learner reflections, counselling sessions, interviews, and journals. Knowledge, therefore, emerges from lived experiences and is co-constructed in relationships, shaped through dialogue, and interpreted through the emotional landscapes of teachers and learners (Gkonou & Miller, 2023).

Theme 6: Identity and Becoming

If creativity, autonomy, and wellbeing are visible themes from my perspective as a reader of all six articles who was invited to comment on them, identity is another thread that weaves them together and connects them. Each contribution clearly shows that learning a language is never just about the linguistic side of things, but it is an act of becoming. For example, Cruz's (2025) learners imagine their future English-speaking selves, Bradley's (2025) students negotiate identity through institutional structures and social networks, Johnson's (2025) students form friendships and social relationships, Warabi's (2025) learner groups create shared identities through narrative collaboration, Nunn's (2025) students explore cultural identities through Japanese literature, and in Cohen's (2025) creative-dialogic classrooms, learners play with identities, trying out new voices and ways of speaking.

Closing Remarks

In drawing this commentary to a close, I would like to highlight that these unique LDJ9 contributions are more than an amalgam of the six themes listed above. What connects these articles is their shared belief in the humanity of language learning and teaching, and the need to humanise them even further. Each author, in their own way, views learners and themselves as teachers as people who experience distinct emotions, struggles, hopes, and connections. In addition, these teacher authors do not see themselves as experts, but as vulnerable practitioners who constantly navigate real classrooms, real emotions, and real lives.

And this is when the process of learning and teaching can thrive. It can happen when people feel seen, looked after, and connected; where there is trust, respect, and support in teacher-learner relationships (Gkonou, 2022; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017); when classrooms allow for imagination and creativity; and when language learning and teaching open up possibilities for identity and transformation.

I also see this issue as an open call or invitation to slow down, take one step at a time, listen carefully, and remember that both learning and teaching are relational work that we do with, through, and for others. Language classrooms are a lot more than mere linguistic spaces. Above all, they are and should be treated as inherently human spaces, which are made up by people who bring all of their individuality and complexity into them.

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