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### **Virtual and Other Learning Spaces: Introduction to the Special Issue**

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**Volume 7, Number 2, June 2016**

**Special Issue on Virtual and Other Learning Spaces**

Edited by Curtis Edlin and Jo Mynard

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## **Announcement**

### **Upcoming Event: Empowering Students in Self-Access Learning Conference (ESSALC)**

- Student event to be held at *Kanda University of International Studies*, Japan on October 15, 2016 (details to follow). Conveners: Kie Yamamoto, Neil Curry and Rob Stevenson.

### **Cover design: Curtis Edlin**

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## **Virtual and Other Learning Spaces: Introduction to the Special Issue**

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

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Welcome to issue 7(2) of *SiSAL Journal*, which is a special issue on *virtual and other learning spaces*. The idea for putting together this special issue arose for two reasons. Firstly, we were inspired by the of submissions for the Self-Access Stories project edited by Katherine Thornton whose aim was to “highlight specific experiences of various areas of self-access management in practice, with a view to providing multiple perspectives on each issue” (Thornton, 2015). Some of the submissions and the ensuing discussion on the topic of virtual and other learning spaces prompted the editorial team to do a further call for papers for this special issue. The second reason for putting together this issue reason is that our own institution is currently preparing for a move to a larger, brand new purpose-built facility and this has inevitably resulted in our reevaluating interpretations of self-access for our own context. We wanted the opportunity to learn from others and invite them to the conversation. Environmental factors play a role in students’ learning both inside and outside the classroom and through this special issue we hoped to explore physical spaces, virtual spaces, and even metaphorical spaces in learning, e.g. Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development – ZPD, or Murphey’s Zones of Proximal Adjusting – ZPA (Murphey, 1996; 2013) from both the practical and theoretical perspectives.

This issue contains four full papers, one discussion article edited by Hisako Yamashita, and three papers that form the fifth part of the language learning spaces column edited by Katherine Thornton.

### **Full Papers**

The first paper, by Curtis Edlin unpacks the notion that learning environments have a significant impact on learning. The author draws on different perspectives (e.g. psychology, neuroscience, instructional design, ecology, architecture) in order to make a case for informed eclecticism and sets out some principles for self-access design. Edlin suggests reconciling previously competing paradigms within a SALC in order to address diverse student needs and learning preferences.

In the second paper, Sahar Alzahrani and Vicky Wright from the University of Southampton in the UK report on the design and management of an online learning space used by a group of Saudi medical students. The online self-access facility increased opportunities for communication and language practice and helped the learners to develop autonomy.

The third paper, by Tim Murphey, Yoshifumi Fukada, and Joseph Falout takes Murphey's (2014) well becoming through teaching (WBTT) hypothesis as a starting point and the assumption that people not only learn better while teaching others in their social networks, but benefit from the experience personally. The authors describe a study whereby learners documented their experiences of teaching others through weekly essays written as 'action logs'. The findings suggest that learners created affinity spaces (Gee, 2004) for teaching and learning outside the classroom, which contributed to their well being and the well being of those they worked with.

The fourth paper, by Yoshio Nakai reveals how a group of learners gradually took ownership over a physical learning space in Osaka, Japan. The learners were care workers from the Philippines taking intensive Japanese courses and the article is a moving account of how the learners appropriated their classroom to construct a learning space which connected past, present, and future selves.

### **Discussion Article**

This issue features a discussion edited by Hisako Yamashita about best practice for advising which incorporates ideas put forward at two events held in New Zealand. The first one was the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors Aotearoa

New Zealand (ATLAANZ) Conference in November 2013. The second was the Community Languages and English for Speakers of Other Languages Conference (CLESOL) held in July 2014.

### **Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action**

The theme of the newest instalment of the *Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action* column edited by Katherine Thornton is developing learner autonomy through integrating the physical learning space with curriculum. In her introductory article, Katherine Thornton summarises the three contributions in this issue which come from Elaine Wright and Kayoko Horai at Sojo University in Kumamoto, Japan who discuss a collaborative project designed to integrate advising into the language classroom; Vanessa Mar-Molinero and Christian Lewis from the University of Southampton, UK who describe a learning module designed to increase study skills; and finally, Ann Mayeda, Dirk MacKenzie, and Brian Nuspliger from Konan Women's University in Kobe, Japan who reflect on a stamp card incentive system designed to integrate self-access use into the language curriculum.

### **Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to members of the review and editorial boards for their help with producing this issue and to the authors for choosing to publish with us.

### **Notes on the Editors**

Jo Mynard is the founding editor of *SiSAL Journal*. She is an associate professor and the Director of the Self-Access Learning Centre at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. She has an M.Phil. in Applied Linguistics from Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland and an Ed.D. in TEFL from the University of Exeter, UK. She has been involved in facilitating self-access language learning since 1996.

Curtis Edlin is a learning advisor in the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. He holds an MATESOL from SIT Graduate Institute in VT, USA, and has been working in the field of language education since 2007. His current research and writing interests include how we learn,

understanding mediated action in self-access spaces, and the design of self-access learning environments.

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