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Introduction: Papers from JASAL 2017

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Welcome to the Special Issue on JASAL 2017 which was an event organized by the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL). JASAL 2017 was held at the self-access learning center (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, Japan on December 15, 2017. The theme of JASAL 2017 was “Enriching Self-Access Environments”. At the conference, both the presenters and participants explored how they are being creative in enriching their self-access environments with the resources they have. This special issue contains contributions from teachers, advisors and students from universities within Japan, as well as from educators based at a university in Mexico who joined the conference. Some authors explore work in new SACs, some look at more established SACs, and some examine independent learning which takes place outside of SACs, both in and out of classrooms. All of the writers give insight in how to create rich and stimulating environments for learners to grow and develop in. As you will notice, we have included papers written in Japanese as well as English in this issue. One of our initiatives as a Japan-based association is to draw more Japanese educators and administrators into JASAL. We are pleased to publish these papers in Japanese.

There are two conference reviews, the plenary paper by Garold Murray, four papers on SAC policy and services, and four papers which explore collaboration, community and interaction between learners.

Reviews

The first two papers are reviews of the JASAL 2017 annual conference. **Lorraine Reinbold** from Hakuoh University, Tochigi, Japan, gives an overview of JASAL 2017, first summarizing the opening remarks and Garold Murray's plenary talk on the social dimensions of self-access learning centers, and then selecting three themes which ran through the conference, highlighting details from presentations which illustrate ways in which these themes were developed. Reinbold examines presentations which explored the need for SACs and LLS to become social learning spaces, then she summarizes a number of presentations which highlighted the need for structured support, and finally she looks at several presentations which showed the necessity for those who work in SACs to assess and modify their goals and processes in order to continually evolve and meet the needs of the language learners they serve.

Next, **Yui Fukushima**, a student from Konan Women's University, Japan, who attended and presented at the conference, provides a more personal review of the conference, reflecting on the venue, her presentation theme, and the various learning experiences the conference provided for participants and how these will impact on her future work in her university's SAC.

Plenary Paper

Garold Murray, the plenary speaker at JASAL 2017, explores Self-Access Environments as Self-Enriching Complex Dynamic Ecosocial Systems. Drawing on the findings from three studies at a social language learning space at Okayama University, Murray discusses how educators can create spaces which facilitate the emergence of self-enriching complex dynamic ecosystems through their vision, though embracing randomness, and through the connections they build between people and the comfortable atmosphere they cultivate.

SAC Policy and Services

In this section, four papers discuss the writers' learning centers. In the first paper, **Robert Werner** and **Lucius Von Joo** from Ryutsu Keizai University, Ibaraki, Japan, give an account of the challenges and successes they experienced in opening a new self-access center. They explain how they developed short-term and long-term ideas gathered through visits to other SACs and hands-on experience in the Community Learning International Plaza (CLIP) as it began to welcome students. They discuss how they are providing materials and services to promote active learning, increasing their visibility on campus, attempting to involve students in both decision-making and volunteering at the center, and explore their future plans to make English a more fashionable activity.

In the second paper, **Noriaki Furuya** from Waseda University, Japan, and **Fumihiko Kuroda** from Tokyo Metropolitan University, Japan, describe their self-access center and support services offered to international students including Japanese language learning advising service, so that learners can construct their own personalized learning environments to continue their learning autonomously outside of classroom. The authors then discuss on how the advising sessions have helped them notice the need to provide support for the international students more holistically. They conclude their paper with current collaboration they built with different support services in the university. This paper is written in Japanese.

The third paper related to policy is by **Stuart Warrington** from Nagoya University of Commerce & Business, Japan. He documents the history of a self-access centre from when it was founded to the present day, and its ongoing struggle to forge its own unique identity in the face of institutional constraints. Warrington discusses how in this unique situation, he and his colleagues

have strived to find original solutions for these problematic realities, including the promotion of self-access beyond the confines of the physical centre.

In the final paper included in this section, **Katherine Thornton** of Otemon Gakuin University, Osaka, Japan reports on research into language policy in language learning spaces around the world. The results, based on a survey conducted at 30 institutions in nine countries, show that policies range from strict to flexible. While target-language only policies are reported to be more common in foreign language contexts, there is also a general trend toward more flexible language policies.

Collaboration, Community and Interaction

In this section, there are three papers written in Japanese and one in English which explore collaboration, community and interaction in very different learning situations. First, **Yoshio Nakai** from Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan explores the experiences of a JFL language learner from Hong Kong who uses the social networking service “Niconico Douga”. An analysis of her language learning history revealed that she not only utilized Niconico Douga as a resource bank for learning Japanese, but also that it functioned as a virtual self-access learning space. This paper is written in Japanese.

In the second paper, **Kazuko Nagao**, from ENALLT (National School of Languages, Linguistics and Translation) at UNAM (the National Autonomous University of Mexico) and **Silvia González** from Kanda University of International Studies, Japan write about a series of Japanese-Spanish teletandem sessions in which participants discussed their respective countries’ social problems. This paper is written in Japanese.

Next, **Ken Nakano** from Osaka International University, Japan, contributes a paper which focuses on active learning in the context of teaching large classes, outlining how he supported his students in developing debating skills. This paper is written in Japanese.

Finally, **Airi Ota**, a student, and **Kie Yamamoto**, her learning adviser, from Kanda University of International Studies in Japan, provide a collaborative reflection on Airi’s development through a study abroad program in the United States, demonstrating how providing opportunities for learners to share their stories can empower not only the learner, but also their peers.

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Notes on the Editors of the Special Issue

Hisako Yamashita is a lecturer and learning advisor at Konan Women's University in Japan. She is the current president of JASAL. Her research interests include affordances, reflective dialogues and learner autonomy.

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Andrew D. Tweed is a lecturer and learning advisor at Meijo University in Japan. He is the current events coordinator of JASAL. His research interests include learning beyond the classroom, motivation and teacher education.