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Introduction

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Edited by Kerstin Dofs and Diego Mideros

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Introduction

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Welcome to this special issue of *SiSAL Journal*, where we feature papers from the last Research Network on Learner Autonomy (ReNLA) Symposium. The most recent *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée* (or International Association of Applied Linguistics/AILA) Congress took place in August 2021. The congress was carded to take place originally in 2020 in Groningen, The Netherlands. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the congress had to be postponed and took place a year later as an online event run through the University of Groningen. As part of the congress, the ReNLA held a symposium entitled “Autonomy in the time of complexity in a changing world” on August 18th. The symposium included two featured speakers and 11 presentations (for more details, check the AILA ReNLA Newsletter linked to this special issue).

SiSAL Journal usually focuses on research and practice in self-access and learning support services for language learners. However, from time to time, the journal's scope is expanded to draw on broader areas of interest, such as language learner autonomy. When a significant conference is held, such as AILA 2021, there is an opportunity to learn from the contributions of scholars who might not normally publish their work in a journal specialising in self-access. Taking this broader view periodically in special issues of the journal allows for new explorations of broader themes that have significance to the field of self-access. In this issue, the themes of complexity, empathy, case study research and teacher education are prominent. We are delighted to feature nine contributions from colleagues based in eight different countries. There are six research-focused regular papers, one book review, a summary of the AILA 2021 symposium, and the AILA Newsletter.

Contents

The first paper by **Maria Giovanna Tassinari** outlines how a holistic perspective on second language acquisition, using the theory of complex dynamic systems to reflect on

language learning and advising, allows a broader and deeper insight into advising for language learning. She explains that the system is manifold, including the interrelation of individual and social aspects, internal and contextual factors, and a focus on diverse, interconnected/inseparable dimensions of the language learning process. The article also illuminates the usefulness of the complexity perspective for transforming advisors' personal and professional paths.

In the second paper, by **Larissa Borges**, the author presents the Complex Dynamic Model of Autonomy Development (CDMA). This model explains the dynamics of autonomy in the learners' language learning trajectory in relation to a complexity paradigm. She argues that the development of autonomy is a complex process which includes dynamic and fluctuating aspects. Thus, the starting point of autonomy cannot be defined, and it is experienced in a nonlinear and continuous way or ways throughout life. She finds the CDMA useful as a tool for reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation, especially as it may help develop both learner and teacher autonomy.

The third paper, by **Xinyang Lu, Vanessa Mar-Molinero, and Vicky Wright**, features an ethnographic case study that explores the experience of Jason (pseudonym), a Chinese student doing a Master's in TESOL in the UK. Through this case study, the author explores autonomy through agency, identity and language learning strategies (LLS). What makes this case interesting is how the author explores and explains how Jason conceals his atheist identity while participating in Christian meetings. In these meetings, his only goal is to have access to speakers of English with whom he could practise his English and learn linguistic and non-linguistics elements of the language and culture of the UK.

The fourth paper is by **Diego Mideros**, who describes a small-scale qualitative study that focuses on the role that teachers have in promoting out-of-class learning in a blended course designed for airline staff in Trinidad and Tobago. In this study, the author features the cases of three teachers who delivered the course and their role in encouraging their learners to engage with the online segment of the blended course. He found that only one teacher fully encouraged learners to engage in out-of-class studying by actively and purposefully showing learners in the classroom how to approach out-of-class learning for the course. This reinforces the responsibility that teachers have to promote learner autonomy and out-of-class learning from the classroom.

The fifth paper is by **Manuel Jiménez Raya** and **Borja Manzano Vásquez**. The authors skillfully illustrate how they used case pedagogy as a key strategy in a Master's course for future teachers of English at a university in Spain. They analysed six cases constructed by seven students. In those cases, students detailed their experiences during their practicum sessions and discussed how they attempted to promote learner autonomy together with certain difficulties they experienced in the process. In this paper, the authors make a compelling case to incorporate case pedagogy as part of teacher education and to promote both teacher and learner autonomy.

Finally, in their paper, **Larissa Borges** and **Eduardo Castro** discuss the important role of empathy in teacher education. Their study is based on a qualitative study of six case narratives describing in-service teachers during their internship to examine the dimensions of professional competence toward developing autonomy. The authors state that cases have become a crucial tool for promoting student teachers' professional development towards teacher and learner autonomy. The paper describes four dimensions of professional competence that these teachers developed: 1) a critical view of language education, 2) learning-centred teaching, 3) how to create space for managing local constraints, and 4) professional interactions.

Reviews

There are three contributions to the Reviews section. First, a short report from the AILA Congress in Groningen 2021. The second paper is a review of a language learning publication by Maria Blanco (2021). *How to Learn Spanish: A Guide to Powerful Principles and Strategies for Successful Learning and Self-Empowerment*. Finally, there is a link to the AILA ReNLA Newsletter 2021, which features some short articles from presentations at the AILA Congress.

We hope you enjoy reading the articles and become inspired by all these excellent contributions to our autonomous learning community.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the work of our anonymous reviewers in helping to maintain high standards of scholarship in the journal.

Notes on the Editors

Dr Kerstin Dofs is an autonomous learning practitioner and researcher based in the language self-access centre (LSAC) at Ara Institute of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. She has been an active contributor to the autonomous learning field since she first participated in the Individual Learning Association (ILA) conference in Auckland in 2005. Her more recent research interest is around fulfilments in an LSAC of the notions for enhanced motivation in the Self Determination Theory (SDT), related to the concepts of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Dr Diego Mideros is a lecturer in Spanish at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago. He holds a PhD in Linguistics awarded by the same university. His research interests include learner autonomy and qualitative approaches to language learning research. He is the author of the book “Am I an autonomous language learner? Self-perceived autonomy in Trinidad and Tobago: Sociocultural perspectives”, published by Candlin & Mynard.