Soken Mid-Term Report

(Brent A. Jones)

My main soken-related research endeavors during the past few months have been related to conceptualizing a theoretical model of second-language learning motivation, engagement and learning outcomes (Fig. 1). I revised an existing framework used by Skinner and Pitzer (2012) by including learning environment, teaching strategies, and teacher characteristics as the main contextual features that interact with the self component to determine or constitute motivation in this framework. I also added the well-establish concept of identity as the pathway by which context impacts or influences self. In other words, contextual features can be perceived as fulfilling or thwarting the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness. I also added the concept of investment as the pathway from motivation to engagement (action) in this framework. Learning environments, teaching strategies and teacher characteristics that are perceived as supporting the basic psychological needs will theoretically result in deeper investment and thus higher quality engagement at the macro (school), meso (class) and micro (task) levels.
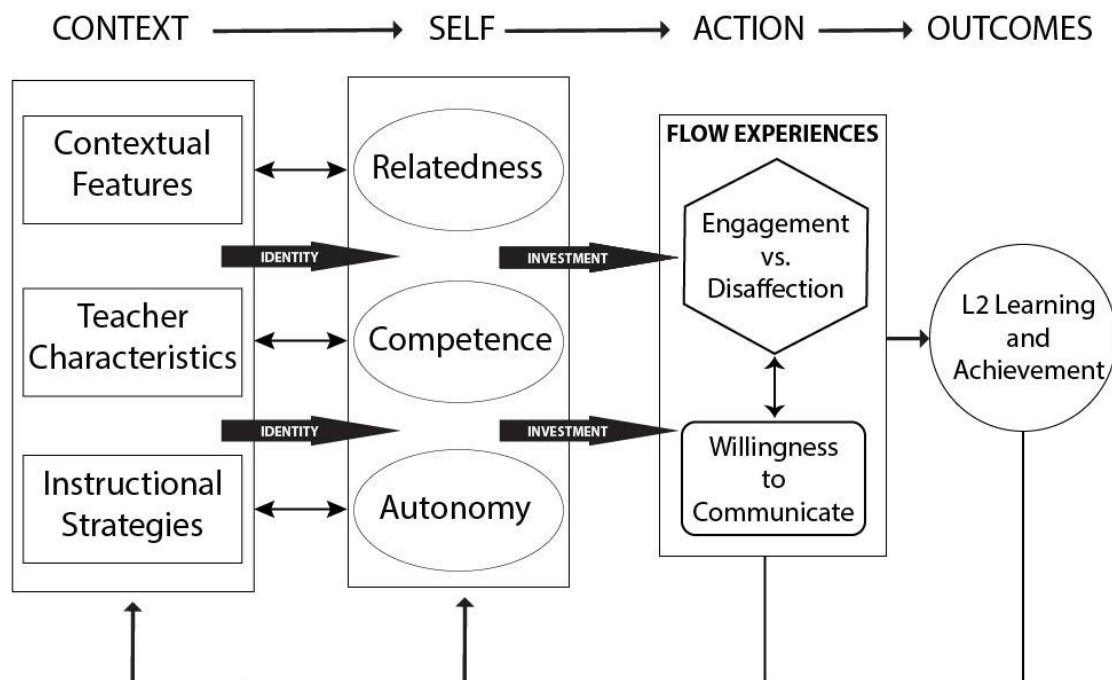

Fig. 1 Theoretical Framework of L2 Learning Motivation and Engagement

(Roger W. Palmer)

In the first 12 months of the research, the main focus of investigation has been on the interplay between engagement and the use of technology in the teaching of second languages. With this in mind, this overview has been broken down into three sub-themes, all of which culminated in short papers presented orally in Japan, Indonesia, and Kyrgyzstan.

The first paper, delivered in June at Matsuyama University as part of the JALT (Japan Association for Language Teaching) CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) 2017 Conference, considered the role of video capture technology (Engaging Students through Video Capture). Giving face-to-face feedback for iBT

TOEFL writing tasks is time-consuming and students do not always feel written feedback is personal. Spoken feedback via a link to the instructor's video text deconstruction is highly personalized, and results indicate that the use of free software (such as JING) is appreciated by students, drawing them in and engaging them in the process of reviewing their own work with the helping hand of the instructor as a guide.

The second paper, delivered in July at the 15th Asia TEFL International Conference & 64th TEFLIN International Conference, 2017 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, looked into whether casual class conversations are in fact teachable (Teaching Students to Engage in Casual Conversations). The research responded to learner difficulties with unstructured speaking. Casual conversation is sometimes considered spontaneous and (thus) less deserving of teaching efforts. In fact, this has been found not to be the case. To help learners with casual conversation, dialogues were analyzed and the generic structure identified. Next, modeling and explicit teaching of casual talk enabled students to learn its discourse structure and features. Learner progress was monitored and assessed, with results indicating that by slightly modifying classroom teaching, students participated more effectively in spoken interactions and were more deeply engaged in learning. Encouragingly, the instruction appeared to stick, with students applying what they had learnt to other L2 speaking contexts. Through targeted and explicit instruction, it appears that casual conversation can be taught systematically and that results regarding student progress are indeed measurable. This has important ramifications for prevailing constructivist approaches in Japan and further afield, which overemphasize practice and undervalue teaching.

The third paper, delivered in September at the JALT Teachers Helping Teachers 9th Annual Series of Seminars in Kyrgyzstan, took as its focus the principle of the campfire moment (Maximizing student engagement through Kahoot!). Such a moment is when people huddle closely together, akin to the magic of the campfire when they crowd around transfixed by its natural luminosity and warmth. This maximum attention is engagement in action. In the workshop, participants were shown ways to make use of any portable digital device available to students (smartphones, tablets, and laptops) to boost motivation and maximize learning using Kahoot!, a free, interactive, game-based learning platform and online quiz maker. The platform energies the classroom atmosphere, heightens engagement, and involves students in the learning process. Teachers use Kahoot! To make stimulating multiple choice quizzes for students, while creating a social learning environment in which students play games together. While answering the questions on their own device, students see both their answers and their classmates' answers on the main screen, since everyone is connected online by the technology and emotionally as part of the competitive game they are trying to win. Students who normally sit at the back (and are disengaged) are on the edge of their seats as they strive to beat their classmates: not only do they get points for the correct answer, but for answering quickest. Everyone has to look up at the main screen and away from their own device to see how they are doing in the game in relation to their peers.

Preliminary findings indicate that technology does have an important role to play in engagement as part of the teaching and learning of second languages.

(Mayumi Asaba)
My research is case studies of four EFL teachers at Japanese Universities. Based on criteria proposed by expertise studies in general education, I selected four participants. The criteria included years of experience teaching, educational background, and recommendation from supervisors that were familiar with their work.

At this point of research, I have already completed my data collection, which included classroom observations, interviews, and student focus groups. I am now in the process of analyzing data. For this research, both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis are used. That is, I examine four participants individually first and then look for similarities and differences among these participants. Especially, I look for some themes that indicate their expertise and how their expertise was reflected in their teaching.

(Keiko Yoshida)
In the first year of the present research, I collected literature of engagement research mainly conducted in the tertiary education in Japan. Ogata (2008), for example, revealed that certain features of educational programs and student engagement are important factors to develop learners' general and academic skills. This result replicates the findings obtained from the previous engagement research made in the United States. Okada and Torii (2011) administered a self-report questionnaire to university students in Japan to investigate their learning mechanisms and outcomes focusing on the relationship of their class experiences, attitudes toward study, and achievements in their learning.

Based on the literary analysis in the first year, I will conduct an EFL student engagement survey and English class observations in the second year to discover students' EFL class experiences, attitudes toward English learning and outcomes in their learning.