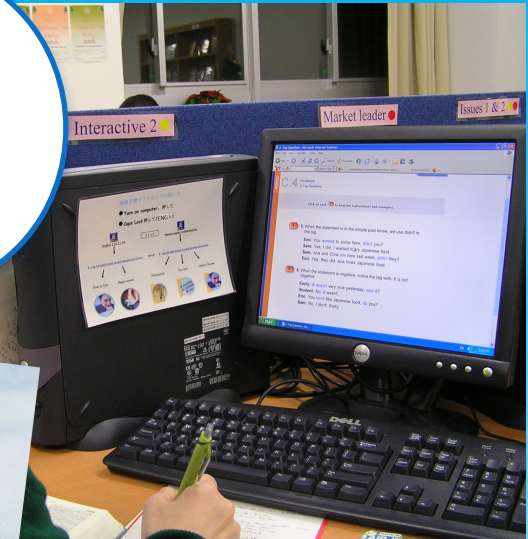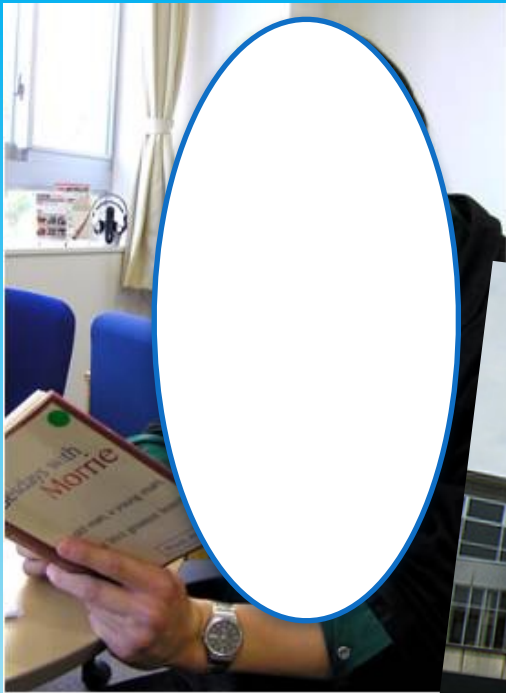# Self-Access Environments as Self-Enriching Complex Dynamic Ecosocial Systems
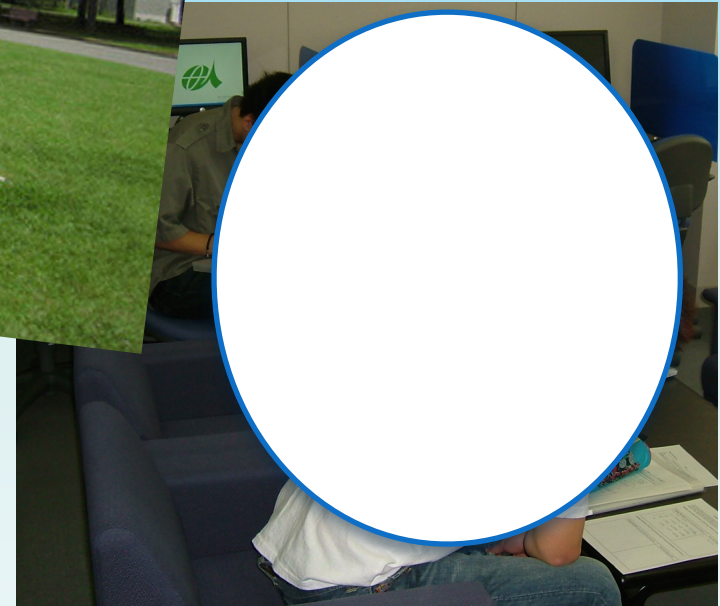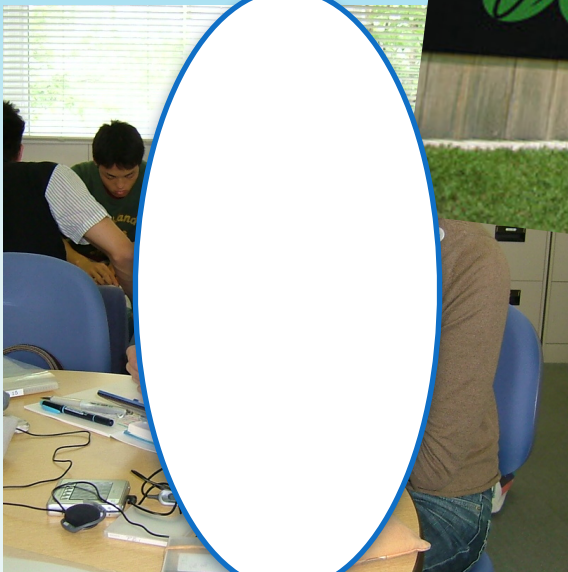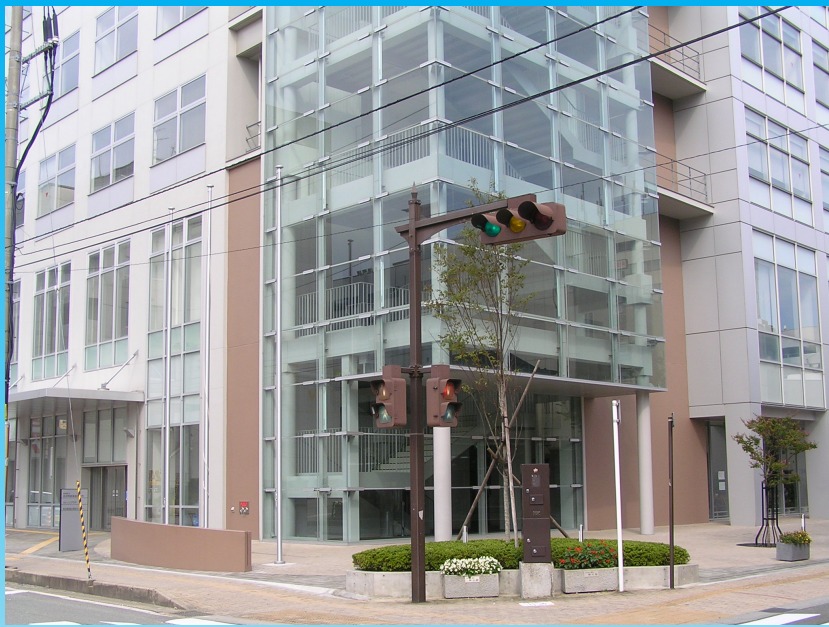
Garold Murray, PhD

Okayama University

JASAL Annual Conference 2017

Kanda University of International Studies

16 December 2017

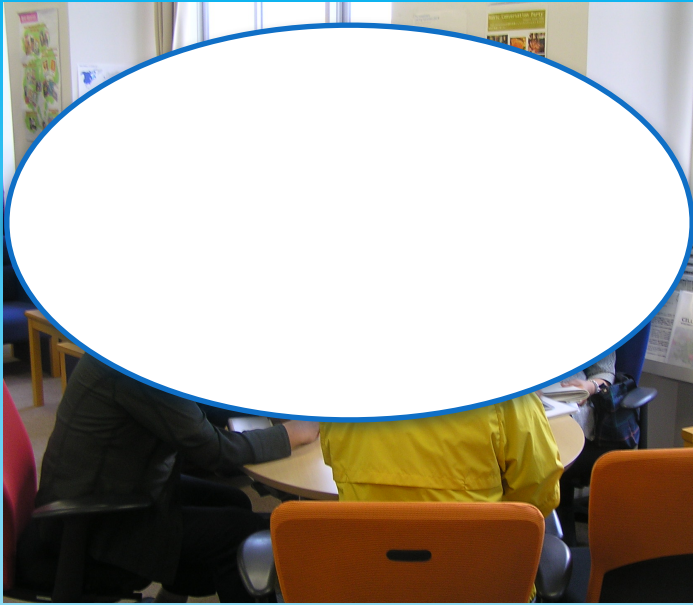Self-Access Centre

AIU Campus

国際教養大学
Akita International University

Self-access for general public in downtown Akita

Social activities
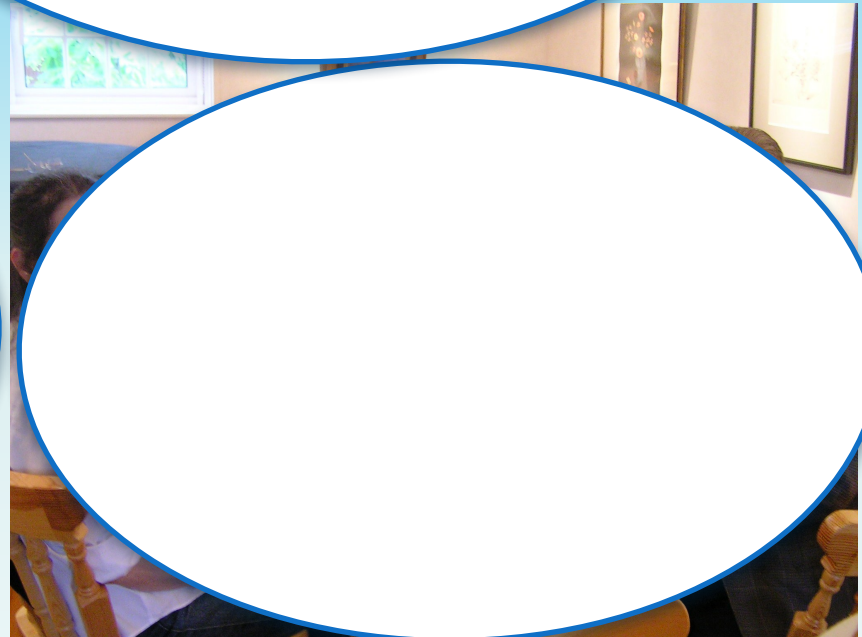
Research at Okayama University

Ethnography (5-year)

Multiple-case study

Narrative inquiry

My argument

Self-access centres transformed into social learning spaces have the potential to become self-enriching complex dynamic ecosocial systems.

Preview

Part 1 What?

What is a social learning space?

What is a complex dynamic ecosocial system?

Part 2 Why?

Why would you want one?

Part 3 How?

How can you get one?

Part 1 What?

What is a social learning space?

What about the studies?

What is the theoretical background?

Social learning space: The *L-café*
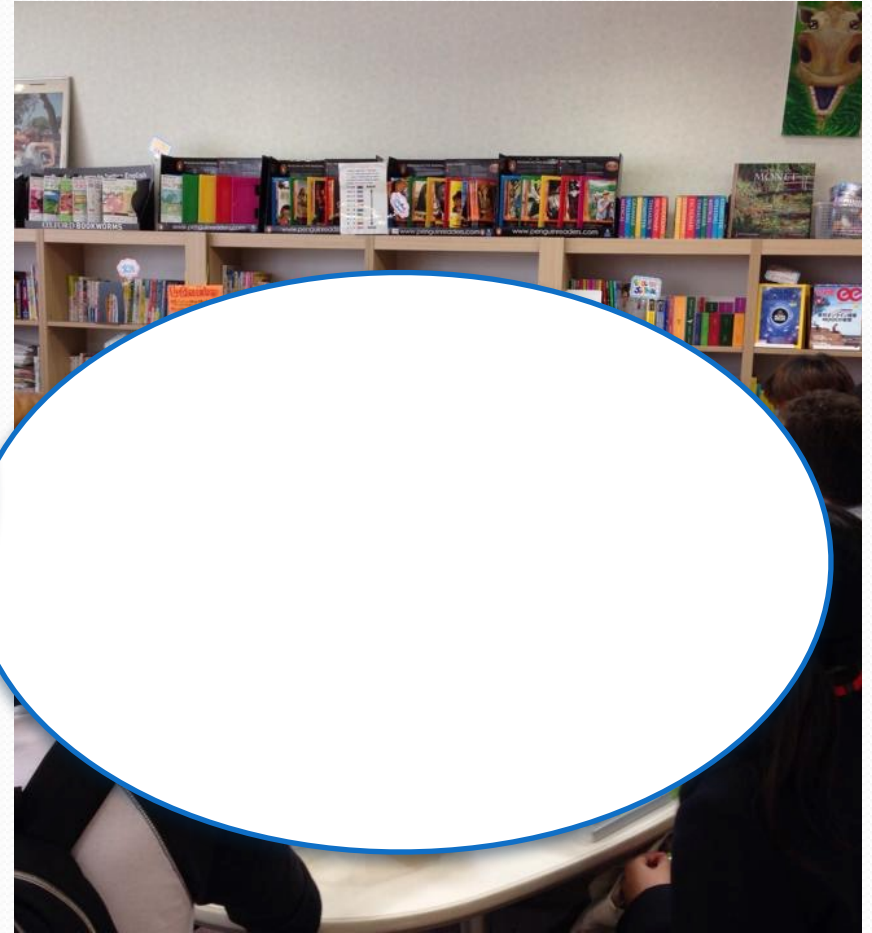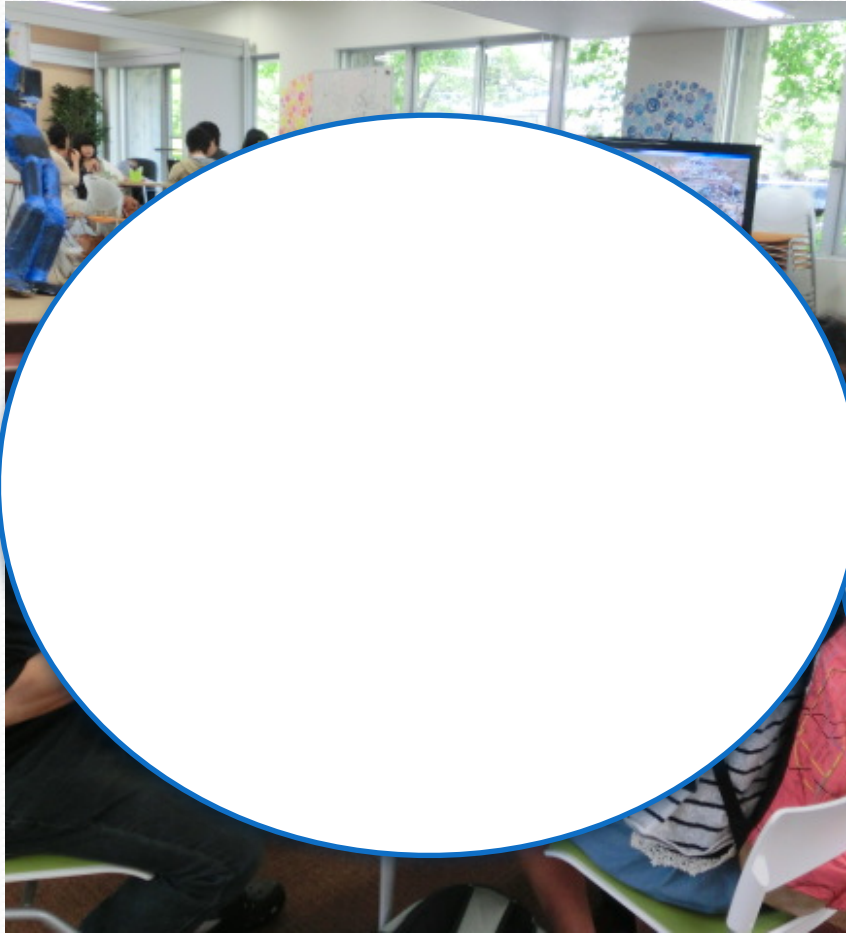
From *English Café* to *L-café*

English Café (2009)

L-café (today)

L-café activities

Peer-taught classes

Events

The Studies

Ethnography

Multiple Case Study

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry: 16 Stories

1 University VP

2 LC Managers

4 Teachers

9 Students:

    7 Japanese

    2 International

        Palgrave, 2016

Theoretical background

Community

Complex dynamic systems

Space

[CCDSS]

Communities of practice

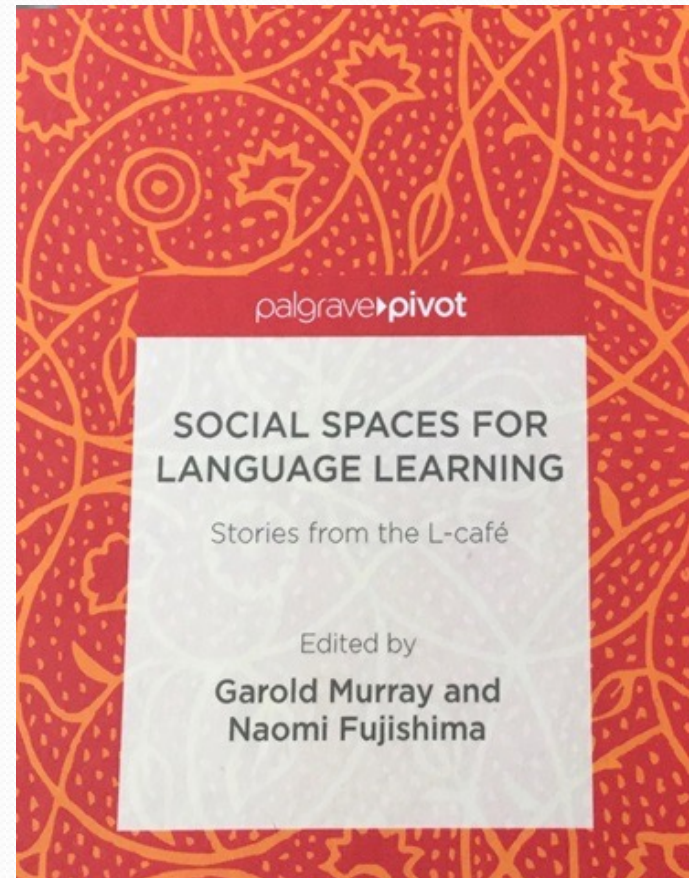"Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4)

Complex dynamic systems

- Comprise many interacting components

- Self-organize to produce new phenomena (emergence)

- Encompass different levels of organization

- Defy prediction

- Draw on outside resources; i.e., they are open

Space

Space and place

- Places are social constructions.
- Places are created by people doing things in a space.
- People talk about this space as a place where these activities occur.
- Places are the product of action and discourse.

Developing a social learning space

- Open up a space of possibilities

- Support community development

- Facilitate the emergence of complex dynamic systems
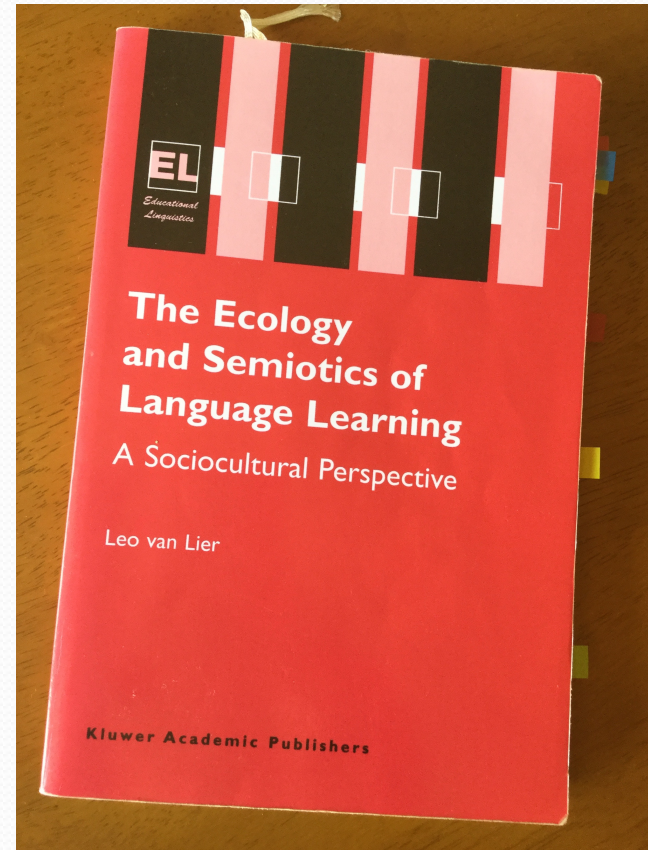
Part 2 Why?

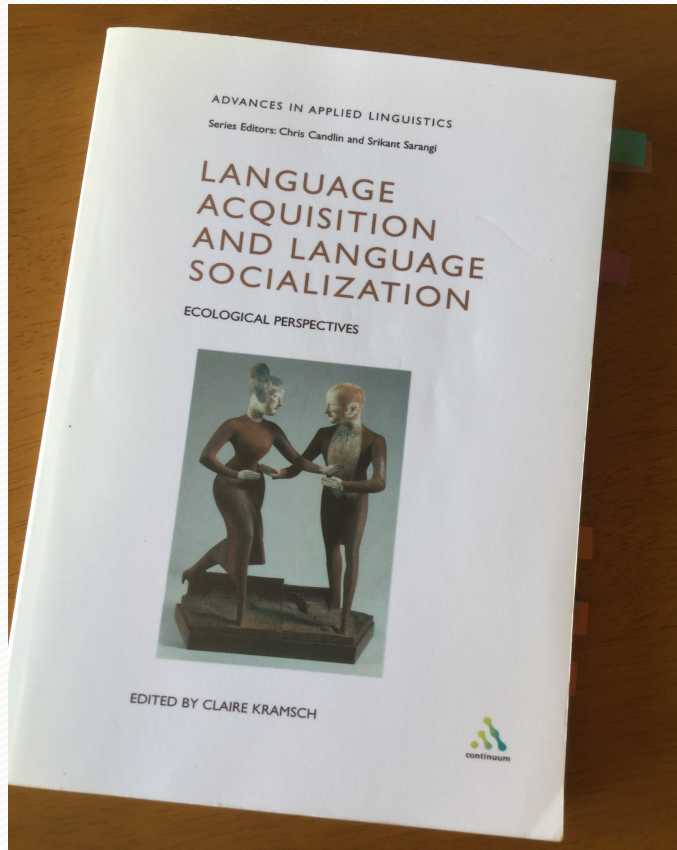Why do you need a social learning space?

A complex dynamic system?

Why? Because...

We want a space that is going to support the emergence of all kinds of learning possibilities – especially ones that we haven't even dreamed of!!!

Ecology in applied linguistics
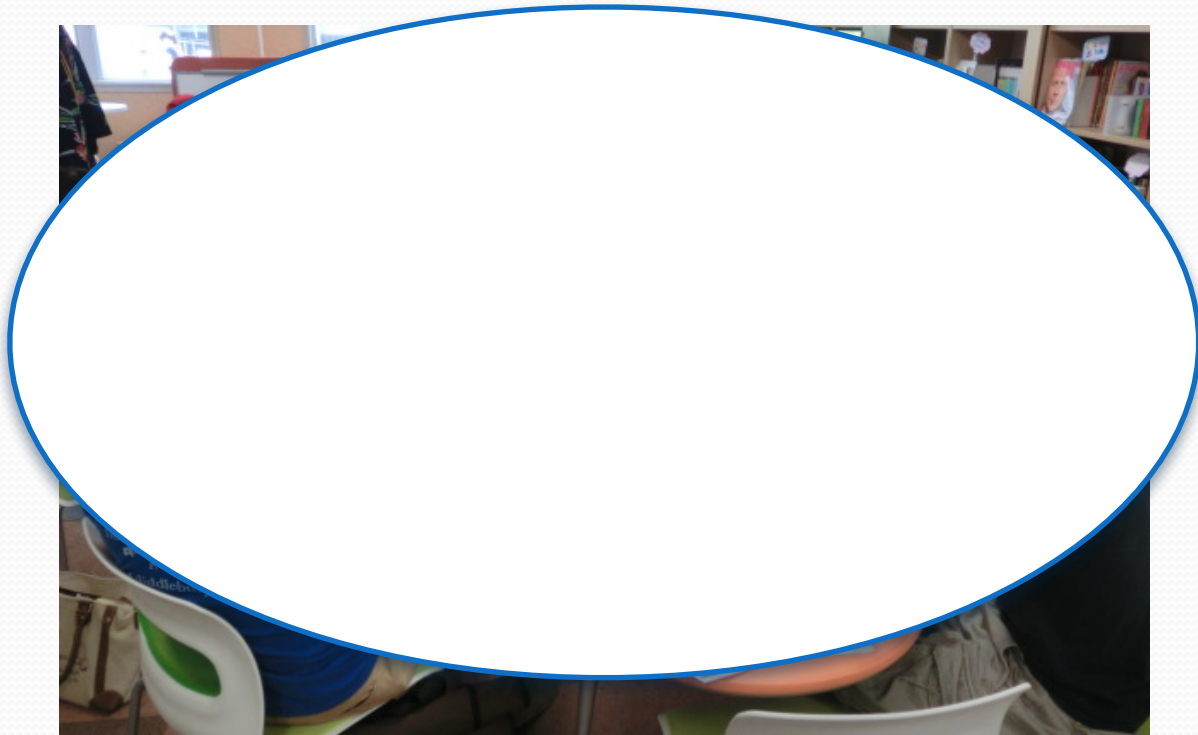
Affordances

Affordances are **possibilities for action** that emerge through the animal's interaction with the environment. (Gibson, 1986)

As a complex dynamic ecosocial system,

a social learning space has the potential to offer a wide variety of affordances for all kinds of learning.

1 Affordance: Friendship

Intercultural exchange → Help / support → Language practice

Friendship → Language practice

"When I make new friends at English Café, I talk to them in English, but outside, if we go out for dinner, we talk in Japanese. And, that's of course improve my Japanese.

Because first time when I came to Japan, there is no English Café, there is no place together. Just Japanese class …and my lab….

I was a little bit disappointed, I'm in Japan, difficult to make friends. But after English Café opened, I met many friends." (Ahmed, Kuwait)

Friendship → Intercultural exchange

"In Café, I always had many friend there…
I could learn their background in U.S., Britain, or Germany.
Not only the language but the *culture*. That kind of experience, it couldn't be learned on the textbook." (Dongik, Korea)

Friendship → Support

"Between *Japanese* students especially, they often talk like, 'I *can't do* listening *well*, my TOEFL score is *not good*,' and usually the other student gives advice. And it's the same… 'You spend *more time*, you *focus* on the learning.' It's the *same*, but they *repeat* so many times, I hear it a *lot*. But, still they ask.

I think… *they* want to be *heard*, their *struggles* or their *worries* or their *difficulties….*

And if some students say, 'I learned *this* much this week,' and everybody feels, 'Oh, you're great!' [laughs] Then *maybe*, other students say, 'Oh, maybe I should do better at ….'—that kind of like *peer* pressure..."

(Mariko, English/L-café Manager)

Benefits

Social learning spaces have the potential to generate any number of affordances for learning and improving the quality of university life for both local and international students.
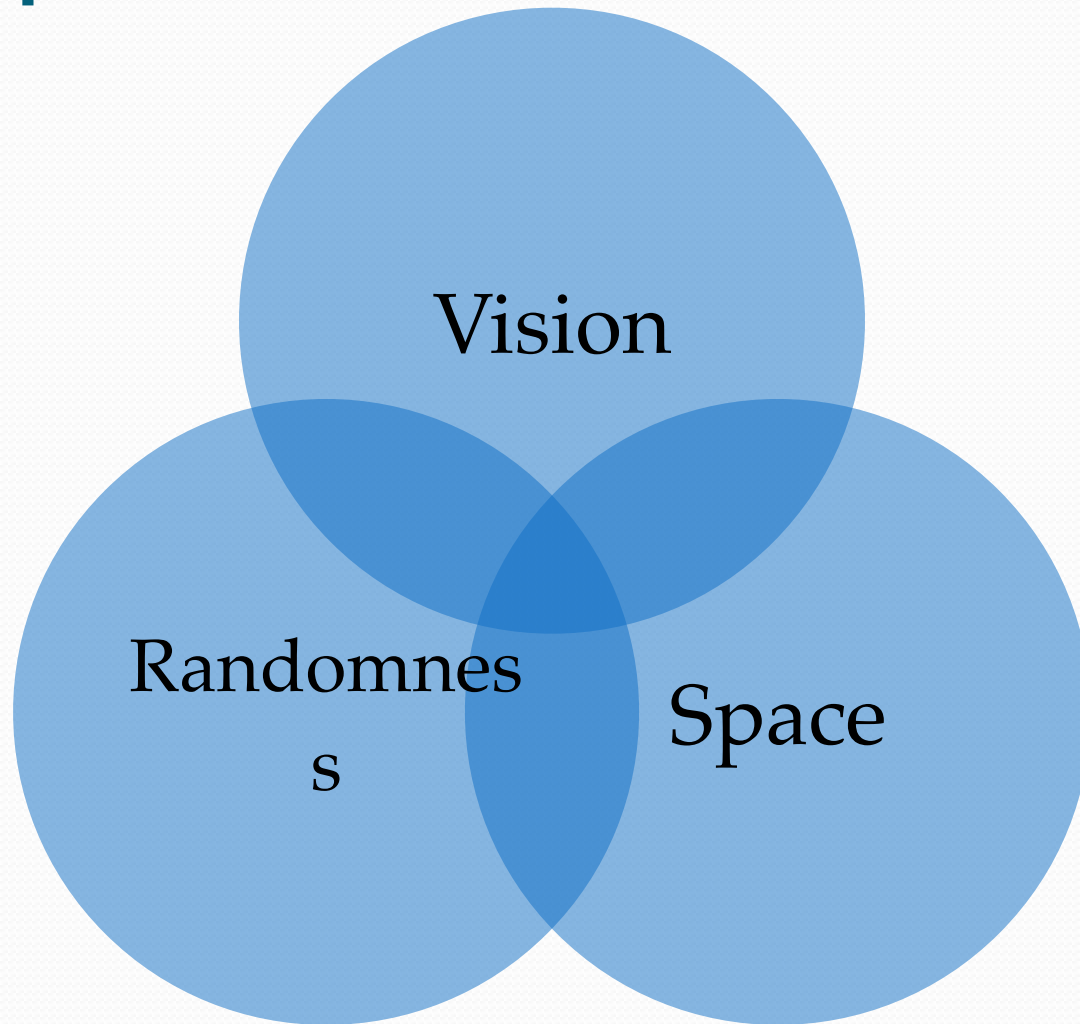
Part 3 How?

Fostering complex dynamic ecosocial systems

My argument revisited

For social learning spaces to become self-enriching and to provide a wide range of benefits, they need to be complex dynamic ecosocial systems.
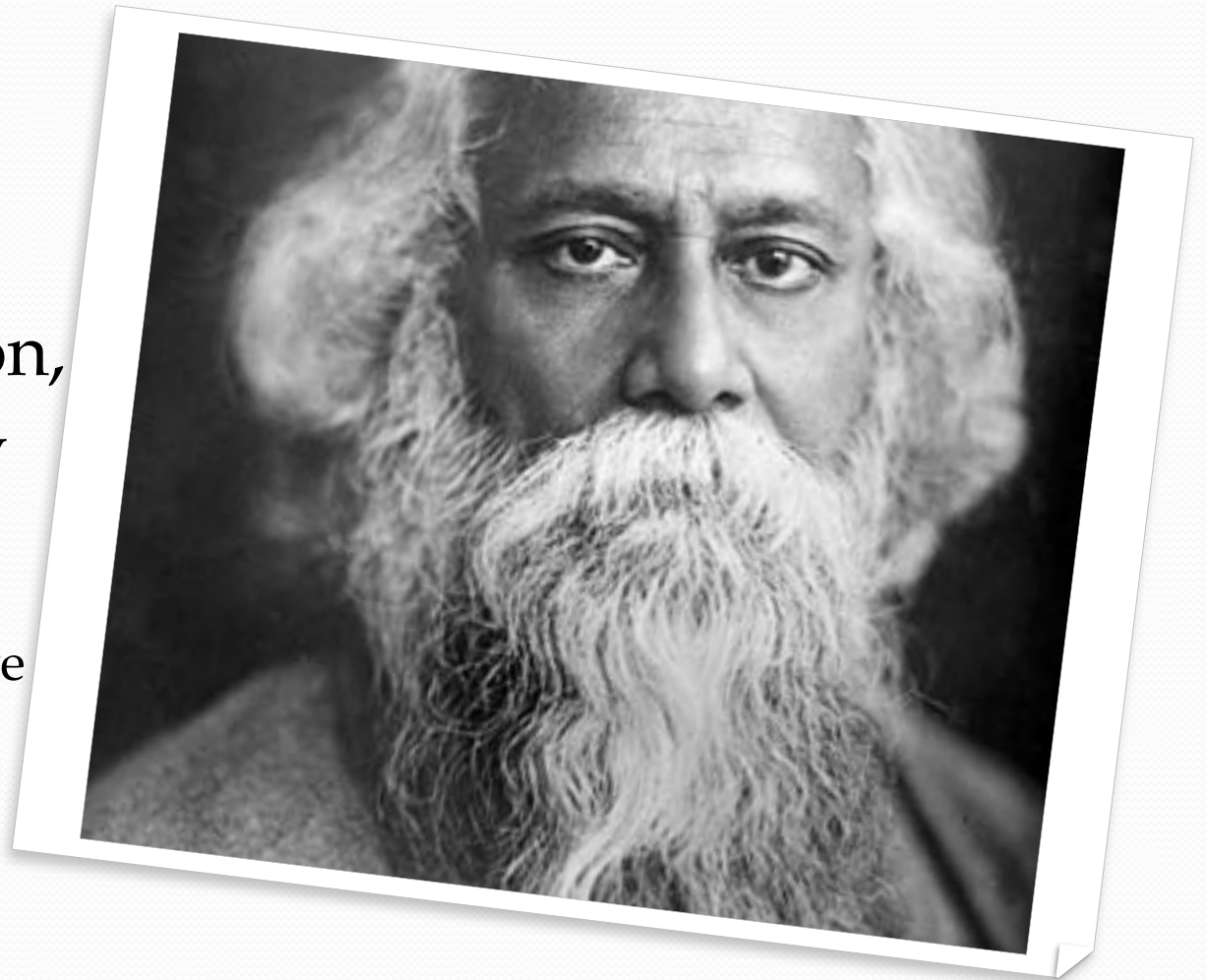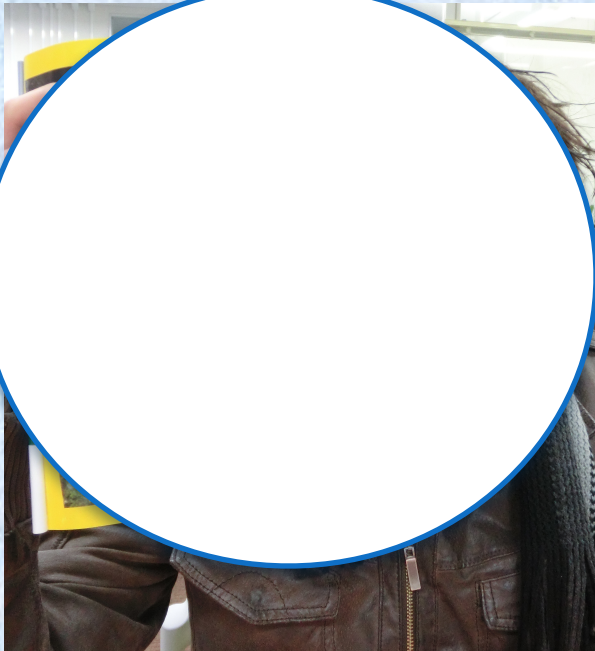
Conceptual model

Vision

"The stronger the imagination, less imaginary the results."

Rabindranath Tagore

Embrace randomness!

Space: An active agent

"The medium is the message", Marshal McLuhan
(from *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,* 1964)

The space is the message.

Dressing the learning space

"They can see *pictures* and *colourfulness* from *outside*. It *looks fun*… fashionable, even like *furnitures* and chairs, couch is *fashionable, colourful,* of course, it is *attractive for students*." (Shinpei)
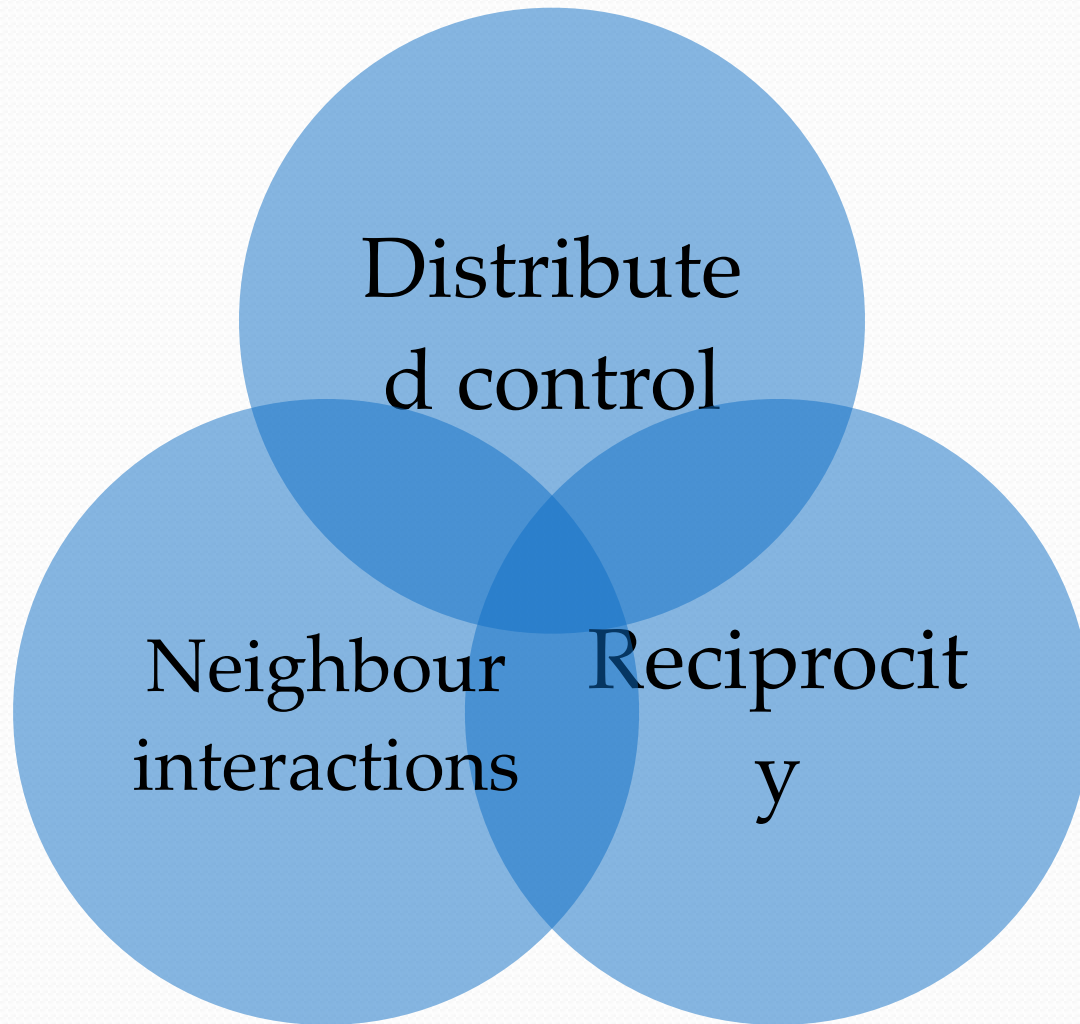
Colour, design, perceptions

"The bright and cheerful colours of the L-café feel warm, make it feel like variety is encouraged. You can be different." (Claire)

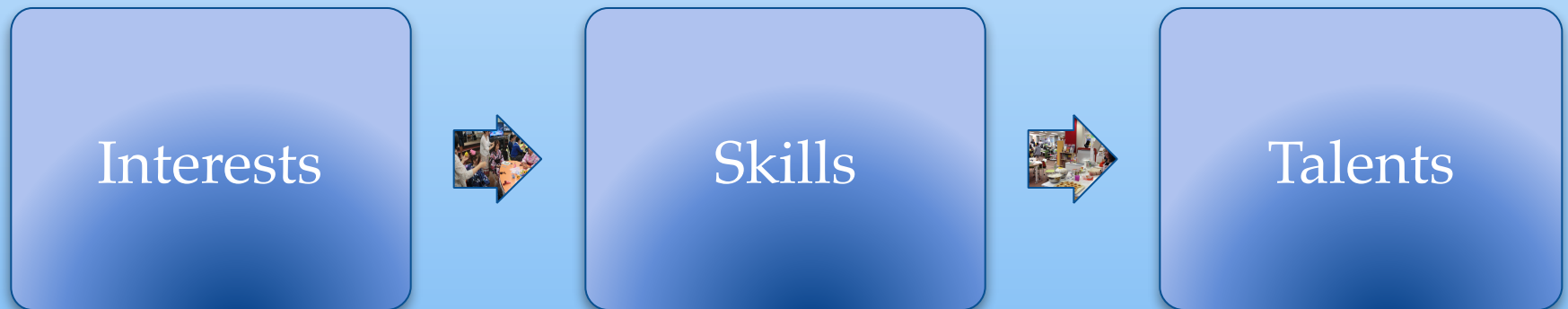# Conceptual model

Distributed control

Neighbour interactions

"She's always trying to connect people. Like, 'You, why don't you try to talk to him about this?' Or, 'You know, actually he's really good at playing something'…. So, she's connecting people that are there…which is kind of – the community creates itself…." (Lena)

Diversity

Interests → Skills → Talents

Reciprocity

We help each other.

We learn and grow together.

Conclusion

Conceptual model for a social learning space

- Vision
- Space
- Randomness
- Distributed control
- Neighbour interactions
- Diversity
- Reciprocity

Self-access centres transformed into social learning spaces have the potential to become self-enriching complex dynamic ecosocial systems.

Thank you for listening!

Final thought:

Keep things stirred up or they'll stick to the bottom!