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When I was a junior high school student, I encountered an East African proverb within the pages of a comic book. The proverb is “Mountains do not meet, but people do.” As it states, one of the best things about academic conferences is that people meet and connect with each other. The past few years we had to hold our events online, and I realized again how important it is not only to listen to research presentations but also to have conversations in the hallways, to ask questions after presentations, and to chat at the reception. So I am very happy to meet you in person at long last. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you for attending the 53rd Annual Toyama Conference of the Chubu English Language Education Society (CELES).

I have repeatedly expressed my belief that CELES should function as a platform for practitioners, researchers, administrators, and other English education enthusiasts to exchange opinions on various issues from different perspectives and in “horizontal” relationships. Throughout what promises to be a fruitful and productive two-day meeting, I hope that you are all able to enjoy yourselves.

Following the proposals of the Working Group for Supporting Young Members, a meeting for graduation thesis and master’s thesis presentations was held last February. It was successful, with eight presentations and about 50 participants. At this Toyama Conference, “work-in-progress” sessions have also been set, providing an opportunity to present ongoing research and practices, and undergraduate students have been exempted from the participation fee. I expect more and more prospective teachers/researchers to engage in CELES.

At the Toyama Conference, the symposium entitled “How to Learn English in the Reiwa Era: Developing Autonomous Learners” will provide an opportunity for us to discuss how to achieve optimal individualized learning and collaborative learning in English education. Although moving away from simultaneous whole class instructions is expected, it is very often seen that English is taught at a uniform rate of progress and all the students in class do the same things. This symposium will be a good chance to reconsider which direction we should go.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the members of the Executive Committee, as well as to the presenters and participants. I also wish to express my special thanks to the Toyama Prefectural Board of Education, Toyama City Board of Education, Toyama Prefectural Association of Senior High School English Teachers, Toyama Prefectural Association of Junior High School English Teachers, Toyama Prefectural Association of Elementary School English Teachers, and Toyama English Teaching Method Study Group for their support.