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## Conference Review

# Know Thyself, Know Thy Research Methods: The Winter 2013 Qualitative Research Workshop

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The Japan Association for Language Teachers (JALT) Special Interest Group (SIG) for Colleges and University Educators (CUE) held a one-day workshop that focused on qualitative research on December 1, 2012 in Nagoya at Nanzan University. With two facilitators and approximately 20 participants, there were several discussions on different kinds of qualitative research and plenty of ideas and suggestions for research topics. While JALT meetings and workshops are often seen as being attended predominately by native English speaking male university teachers, this workshop was a clear indication that JALT, and the CUE SIG, has a diverse range of members. While mostly university teachers, participants had various teaching experience and backgrounds which made for some interesting discussions with regards to research needs, support from employers and necessity to publish. Male and female participants were nearly equally represented as were the numbers for non-native and native English speaker participants. The wide range of experiences and interests meant that people could easily connect with at least a few other participants and perhaps work together in future research projects.

Dr. Naoko Aoki, a professor at Osaka University, and well known for her outstanding research in learner autonomy and teacher education, started the morning off by discussing “Narrative Inquiry” and storytelling that focused on our own personal experiences as students and as educators. This helped us to

better understand our professional and teacher identity, which was something that some of us had not done before. By sharing in small groups, participants explored issues that are important to them as teachers and why these matters might be worthwhile to explore in our research. Dr. Aoki completed her time by having group poster sessions that had groups focus on what topics and ideas we felt were significant based on our discussions. For more information on Dr. Aoki's research and publishings, please visit her Osaka University Web page (<http://osaka-u.academia.edu/NaokoAoki>).

Dr. Robert Croker, a Nanzan University professor and teacher trainer, covered a wide range of important topics including types of qualitative research, forming good research questions, ethical concerns, data collection techniques and data analysis. He also introduced transcription software, observation sheets and research design. Many participants struggled with forming good research questions, so a large quantity of time was spent on this one area. Dr. Croker was able to deal with the numerous questions and concerns from participants, not only about research topics and forming good research questions, but also about the process of finding participants and keeping to a research schedule. This session contained essential information with regards to how to properly formulate research questions and how to get started on your research journey. At the end of the day, we also received information about which journals in the applied linguistic field are qualitative research friendly, about research trends in language teaching and about guidelines for conducting research in TESOL. For those who couldn't attend the workshop and who would like to read about some of the topics cover in this session, *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics*, co-edited by Dr. Croker, is highly recommended.

With the "publish or perish" stress that is very prevalent amongst university staff these days, this workshop provided much-needed tools and suggestions on how to get started and improve your research techniques. The only suggestion that I personally have is to lengthen the days from one to two and for CUE to offer more of these types of workshops. As the workshop came to an end, all participants agreed that the time was well spent and expressed an interest in attending more workshops in the future.

## **References**

Heigham, J., & Croker, R. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Qualitative research in applied linguistics*. London, England: Palgrave-Macmillan.

## **Author's bio**

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