
Conference Review

The 2015 JALT CUE Conference

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The 2015 JALT CUE Conference with the theme “Diversity: Communication and Education” was held at Sugiyama Jogakuen University in Nagoya on September 26 and 27. With the help of a dedicated group of student interns, the two plenaries, eighteen paper presentations, and five workshops flowed smoothly. As a new CUE SIG member and first-time conference attendee, I was pleased to find the atmosphere warm and welcoming even from the beginning. All the presenters seemed eager to interact with the audience, and it was easy to get to know people during breaks and mealtimes.

Sugiyama University was a good choice for this conference. Located near several cafes and restaurants, the campus was just a short walk from Nagoya’s subway system. The facilities were just right for the number of attendees and the types of presentations being given. The helpful “Green Team” interns, all students at the host institution, were especially notable. They were present throughout the campus to guide attendees, and they provided helpful tips about the surrounding neighborhood.

After a brief address by the organizers, the conference got underway with concurrent paper presentations. Talks were mainly practitioner-oriented and covered a variety of topics such as vocabulary acquisition, students’ pedagogical preferences, and incorporating distance learning into on-site courses. The range of topics covered gave me a well-rounded view of what other university educators in Japan are doing in various types of classes. I took away a number of ideas that I was immediately able to put into use in my own classroom, such as how to best incorporate smartphones into classes and how to help students focus on their individual language learning goals. All of the presentations I attended were met

with thought-provoking discussions and comments from the audience members.

The two invited plenary talks complemented each other well and tied in closely to the conference theme of diversity. Saturday's speaker, James D'Angelo of Chukyo University, gave a talk entitled, "World Englishes, EIL, and English as a Lingua Franca: Incorporating a Pluralistic View of English into our Teaching." D'Angelo explored the history and evolution of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and outlined a number of actions teachers in Japan can take to better prepare students to communicate in English in an international context. He recommended we educate ourselves on ELF by reading research on the topic and attending ELF-focused international conferences. Furthermore, teachers should help students communicate as educated speakers of their own local English variety instead of prioritizing accuracy. Doing these things would help us better understand the needs of our learners and thus make our courses more useful for them. D'Angelo also suggested we help students forge links with the ELF-speaking world as much as possible by using non-native English varieties as examples, setting up Skype communication partners, and using other real-world tasks. The practical ideas D'Angelo gave are helpful for teachers who are interested in forging closer links between the classroom and the real world. Shortly after the conference, I started to integrate more non-native speakers' English as examples during lessons, which students seemed to enjoy.

On Sunday afternoon, Tadashi Shiozawa of Chubu University gave the second plenary talk. Continuing with the theme of World Englishes, Shiozawa discussed the diversity of English teaching and learning in Japan from the viewpoint of a non-native speaker. With a variety of both native and non-native speaker teachers, an array of student motivation and proficiency levels, and a range of facilities, teaching methods, and resources being used, many challenges can arise in English teaching in Japan. He asserted that these difficulties, however, can be considered an advantage in teaching because it compels us to think and solve problems in new ways.

Shiozawa stated that we should not only accept the use of different Englishes by students and teachers, but we should expect that they speak as users of their own international variety. He echoed D'Angelo's recommendation of focusing

on overall intelligibility over native-like accuracy, and he suggested we create programs where students can interact with proficient World English speakers. Using a textbook he co-authored as an example, Shiozawa showed how teachers can expose students to other English varieties in the classroom by using non-native speaker models. It was interesting to hear the array of voices used in the listening sections in his textbook. As nearly all of my current textbooks use only native speaker models, I found this to be especially refreshing.

Five hour-long workshops ran simultaneously with the presentations. In the interest of attending as many short talks as possible, I chose to attend only one workshop. On Sunday, Jenell Rae of Sugiyama University led us through an exploration of written corrective feedback methods, which is one of my own areas of interest. After a short overview, participants had a chance to evaluate a student's writing sample and discuss the techniques they used. I was surprised to find that seemingly small differences in approach led to big discrepancies in scoring. I greatly appreciated this chance to examine feedback practices with colleagues. The workshop provided a good opportunity to discuss and challenge our beliefs about what is best when evaluating student work.

The CUE SIG Annual General Meeting followed Saturday's plenary. SIG Coordinator Wendy Gough reminded us of upcoming group events, namely the 4th CUE ESP Symposium in 2016 and the 25th anniversary conference in 2018. As she pointed out, the CUE SIG is JALT's largest special interest group, but member involvement in recent years has been low. She thus suggested several ways to get involved with the planning of these events and with the SIG in general. *OnCUE Journal* editor Glen Hill and others urged us also to consider contributing to or working on the *CUE Circular* newsletter (the newest addition to the SIG's publications) or the *OnCUE Journal*.

Overall, this was an enjoyable conference to attend. I left the conference with a number of practical ideas to implement in my teaching, and there were ample opportunities for networking. The positive attitude of the organizers inspired me to get more involved in the SIG by writing this review. I have also kept in contact with a number of teachers that I met at this conference. Because the CUE SIG is JALT's largest group, I was surprised to find that only 38 members were in

attendance. The smaller group, however, made it easy to get to know most of the people present. In several of the sessions I attended, most if not all of the audience members were able to contribute to post-presentation discussions.

While there were clear benefits to having a smaller number of attendees present, it would be wonderful to have a larger number of SIG members to share teaching tips and research ideas at future conferences. I urge other college and university teachers to consider attending or presenting at upcoming CUE events. The comfortable atmosphere makes it a great place to get feedback on research and share teaching ideas. The conference is also a valuable opportunity to forge new relationships with teachers from institutions around Japan and to become more active in the CUE community.

Author bio

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