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# Conference Reviews

## A review of JALT 2022

Steven G.B. MacWhinnie

*Hirosaki Gakuin University*

The annual JALT conferences was held November 18–21, 2022, in Fukuoka at the Fukuoka International Congress Center. The theme of the conference was “Learning from Students, Educating Teachers—Research and Practice”. This was the first face-to-face conference held since 2019. Thanks to the support of the organizers and volunteers, the conference experience was enjoyable with no obvious problems. This was my second in-person JALT conference. Even more than in previous conferences, the presenters and attendees seemed eager to share their ideas and network. What follows is a review of some of the sessions I was able to attend over the course of the conference.

The conference began with Technology in Teaching and Professional Development workshops on Friday. Although the presentation and workshop scheduling made it difficult to attend more than a few sessions, I attended two. First, Lisa M. Hunsberger gave presentation ideas for maintaining students’ attention. The main takeaway from the talk was that teachers should use good quality images and know how to use the different visual tricks in presentation software, such as good quality visuals with little text and sans serif fonts, using light colors on black backgrounds, and using transitions to morph to show movement between two slides. Hunsberger also provided information on royalty-free images. Finally, she shared some ideas on how to make presentation slides more visually interesting. The second session I attended was on effective use of machine translation by Louise Ohashi. Ohashi presented information about the current state of translation technology and her research findings on teacher attitudes towards that technology. She also provided examples of how machine translation might be used to help students develop their writing skills.

Saturday sessions began with a plenary session from Jim McKinley entitled “Supporting the (Language) Teaching-Research Nexus”, which was based on the premise that much of what language researchers do is not accessible to language teachers. McKinley argued that grassroots-teaching-informed research can provide a method to bring research back to being teacher centric. He further suggested that Japan provides an ideal setting, as many researchers are also actively teaching. McKinley suggested that many language teaching professionals in Japan may not be taking advantage of their unique position to be holistic language teaching professionals.

Following the opening plenary session, I attended Dr. Charles Browne’s session titled, “Gamified Learning of the New General Service List: Wordle, Quizlet, and more”. This session provided ideas on how to incorporate games into the teaching of vocabulary in the classroom. The main takeaway was the app created by the presenter called Word-Learner, which was demonstrated to be an interesting and engaging way for students to develop their vocabulary.

In the “Learning Through Online Study Abroad” session, sponsored by the Study Abroad SIG and presented by Toshiki Oda, Daniel James, Thomas Legge, Tamara Swensen, and Eiko Ujitani, the evaluation of a three-week and an online program was discussed. While the cost for online study abroad is fractional compared to traditional study abroad, the social experience was much more limited than for a traditional study abroad program. For the program under investigation, the presenters argued it was successful. Unfortunately, while the presenters used survey data to suggest a similar level of success compared to traditional study abroad, a lack of a control groups made it difficult to accept the claims at face value.

The afternoon plenary session by Ryoko Tsuneyoshi discussed the problems of English as an international and global language. Tsuneyoshi suggested that this view can be detrimental to Japanese society and contributes to the tendency to ignore cultural diversity within Japanese society.

Mellisa Ogasawara and Chris Horne presented on building awareness of social and cultural issues for social welfare students by modelling their textbook. It was written to introduce social welfare students to socio-cultural issues

they might face while working with foreign residents in Japan. For example, it addresses some of the potential difficulties in international marriages and the problems of worker exploitation. Many Japanese students entering the social welfare field may not know about these issues, and this textbook offers an introduction to social welfare issues that may affect foreign residents.

I attended Todd Jay Leonard's presentation on his experiences in publishing in EFL, sponsored by the Material Writers SIG. Beyond sharing his story of how he came to publish over 20 books, Todd also gave advice to new authors looking to break into the EFL publishing market, such as aspiring writers should attempt to find a niche and not be shy to approach smaller publishers and pitch their ideas.

The first plenary session on Sunday was given by Kensaku Yoshida on "The New Course of Study – From the Point of View of the Needs of the Students", which explained the rationale and the research behind the many changes that have been progressing over the last several decades at MEXT. This talk helped the audience to contextualize the changes to the course of study and the particular changes that MEXT is pushing for in public schools. Yoshida presented research data that showed that the activities that are most often used in the classroom are not the most useful in terms of student development. He explained that the body of research suggests that while teachers may understand how students ought to be taught, this does not always match practice. Yoshida then explained how the new course of study is designed to get students to develop their procedural knowledge over their declarative knowledge. He argued that this will allow students to better use English.

Following that, I attended Gaby Benthien's presentation on "Intercultural Understanding for Pre-service L2 Teachers". This talk focused on the need for pre-service teachers to develop their professional identity alongside the development of their active teaching skills, general language knowledge, and methods to use the textbooks. Benthien introduced her action research approach, wherein she facilitated student understanding and use of culture through a project that required students to interview overseas students. These interviews helped to focus student attention on how Japan is becoming more diversified. Following this, I

attended Andrew Reimann's talk on "Completing the Culture, Communication, Competence Circle". Reimann identified the problems of culture being taught without context, noting it was based largely on stereotypes and overall lacked good representations. He asked the question, "What is needed to communicate effectively and appropriately?" This presentation focused on several different ways to raise cultural awareness in the language classroom through the use of thought-provoking activities to encourage students to confront their stereotypes.

The final plenary I attended was Yilin Sun's talk on "Integrating Culturally Responsive Teaching to Achieve Equity and Success". Sun focused on the issues teachers need to keep in mind to develop students who are resilient and innovative learners. From an American-centric perspective, Yilin suggested that teachers need to be aware of differences in cultural, race, or ethnicity.

Overall, I think that the JALT 2022 was a successful conference. The quality of presentations was high, and people seemed happy to be back face-to-face. While the social aspects of the conference still were limited because of COVID precautions, it was a positive environment that offered a professional networking experience where attendees could learn new things and mingle with colleagues from Japan and abroad.

## Author bio

*Steven G.B. MacWhinnie has been in Japan since 2007. He holds a master's in TESOL. He is now a lecturer in the English Department at Hirosaki Gakuin University, teaching writing and oral communication, and advising graduation theses. He is also currently working on completing a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Leicester. This review was completed for the CUE Member Conference Support Grant. smacwhinnie@gmail.com*

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