INTRODUCTION

Qualitative Research and Learner Development

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The theme for this issue, qualitative research and learner development, emerged from our shared questions and concerns about how such research is conducted. When and why do we decide to take a qualitative approach? For us, a mixture of dissatisfaction with the limitations of results provided by quantitative methods on the one hand and an interest in the richness of narrative accounts of experiences of teaching and learning on the other made qualitative research seem more closely related to our practice and interests. In particular, qualitative research seemed intimately concerned with giving voice to the lived experience of teaching and learning. Masuko's research has focused on issues of learner development and autonomy (Miyahara, 2011) giving voice both to her teaching context, where bilingual development is central to her institution's educational philosophy and public identity, as well as her personal development as a bilingual. Her approach to this has been through narrative explorations of learning histories which have allowed her to engage with such slippery topics as emotion and identity (Miyahara, 2015). Similarly, Chika's interests in learner autonomy have involved her in narrative explorations of the voices of learners and teachers through such themes as reflection, professional development (Hayashi, 2010), learner autonomy (Hayashi, 2011) and collaboration (Hayashi, 2014). As with Masuko, an interest in the learning experience, derived both from her own development as a bilingual and from those in her classroom, have attracted her to the richness of qualitative approaches. Patrick's research is concerned with language and identity using narrative and qualitative approaches that give voice to the participants, whether teachers (Kiernan, 2010), learners (Kiernan, 2018) or cyclists (Kiernan, 2017).

Although, as our experiences attest, qualitative research may appear to be personal explorations that occur outside the mainstream of language teaching, the emergence of qualitative research in language teaching research has its roots in the shift away from a preoccupation with teaching methods towards an interest in the learner that dates back to the 1970s. This shift was realised in the emergence of terms and notions such as "learner-centred," "student-centred," "individual," "learner autonomy," "diversity" and "meeting individual needs" which started to dominate the language learning discourse (e.g., Benson, 2007; and see Larsen-Freeman, 2018). The shift that recognizes the centrality of the learner in the learning process has had a great impact on the foundational ideas that shape research and practice in the field of learner development as well as our own personal ideas. This has resulted in what could be termed as a methodological transformation in research evident in the recent increase in the number of research projects taking a qualitative approach (Benson et al, 2009; Punch, 2009). We see this as a healthy development and a maturing of the field of language education as well as a direction to which we hope the papers in this volume may contribute.

Some of the main areas of inquiry that we proposed to potential contributors at the outset of this project include the following:

1. How do we do qualitative research into learner development?

   What are the practical concerns and issues we face in formulating research questions, in the approaches and methods that we use, in the settings that we choose to explore, and in how we gather and analyse "data"? What do we mean by "data" and "analysis" in qualitative research?

2. How do we negotiate the project with learners and other participants?

   What are the roles, relationships and identities of the researcher(s) and participants? How do we include others in qualitative research?

3. How do we write up qualitative research about learner development?

   In what ways do different genres of writing enable or constrain us in writing about qualitative research into learner development?

4. What makes research into learner development "qualitative"?

   What are the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research? What are the philosophical ideas about knowledge and truth that we can draw on for our research?

5. What ethical issues arise and who "owns" the research?

   What happens when ethical purity meets messy reality?

Using these five main questions as pillars for further inquiry, the aim of this issue was not to provide answers, but to delineate and identify the issues pertaining to conducting qualitative research surrounding learner development. With particular reference to the fifth question listed above, one of the overriding issues that we observed throughout the papers is the subject of reflexivity. This topic is addressed explicitly in some of the papers in this issue, while it is embedded in a more implicit manner in others. A researcher's reflexivity, in the broadest sense, is "the ability to be able to self-consciously refer to him or herself in relation to the *production of knowledge* about the research topics" (Roulston, 2010, p. 116). However, this grand definition leads us to ponder questions about the moral and social value and educational relevance of the knowledge that is generated (Ortega, 2005, 2012). As Ushioda (2018) recently stated in her plenary speech at a Psychology of Language Learning conference held at Waseda University, the following questions need to be addressed: *Who is the research for? Who owns the research? How and why do we conduct research? What is the societal and educational value of the research?* Although such questions are pertinent to all research, these should also be the very questions that we should critically examine when we pursue our research in the field of learner development (and for that matter, qualitative research in general). In turn, the answers to these questions determine whose voices emerge in the published research as well as whether this is a single voice or a Researching the Relationship of Learner Emotion to Language Learning: Issues and Challenges (see Gallagher, this issue; Bakhtin, 1973, 1981).

The ordering of the papers is intended to reflect a move from practical issues and "case studies" towards more methodological, theoretical and abstract concerns. In the first paper, "Researching the Relationship of Learner Emotion to Language Learning: Issues and Challenges," Nicole Gallagher focuses on the affective aspects of language learning with a particular focus on learner emotion and explores first-year Japanese undergraduates' emotions in a discussion class she taught over the period of one semester. The written form of narrative inquiry Gallagher employed for this research study helped the students to reflect on their experiences of conducting extended discussions in English on a regular basis, which resulted in identifying both positive and negative emotions that the students experienced during the class. Sharing the challenges and issues she faced throughout the research study, Gallagher sheds light on the use of written narrative inquiry to better understand learner emotions.

Similarly seeking to explore learner experience through writing, Daniel Hooper's paper "Peering behind the curtain: A Diary Study of Self-directed Learning and Motivation in *eikaiwa*" is a diary study conducted at an English conversation (*eikaiwa*) school in Japan. It is a case study with one Japanese student (Haruka) which draws on L2 diary entries in an attempt to identify motivational factors that contribute to her self-directed language learning in the specific educational setting of *eikaiwa*. Hooper analyses detailed descriptions of Haruka's L2 voice narrated through the written diary entries over 6 months and explores Haruka's key motivational factors together with the specific meaning of going to *eikaiwa* school to her. Hooper also relates L2 diary studies to pedagogical issues and argues for the potential use of L2 diary studies in teaching and future studies.

The third article, "Exploring the Dual Role of Advisors in English Learning Advisory Sessions," Ryo Moriya reports on face-to-face advisory sessions conducted with two Japanese secondary school students in a cram school. As a part-time cram school teacher, Moriya engaged in advisory sessions in English on a regular basis over one year. The data gained through one-on-one sessions with the two students are analysed to identify types of teaching and specific incidents observed during the sessions. Moriya examines the possibilities of conducting advisory sessions in English in contrast to the participants' native language (Japanese) and emphasises the necessity of introducing advisory sessions at the secondary school levels.

Christine O'Leary's "Exploring the Development of Learner Autonomy from a Postmodern and Social Constructivist Perspective: Prioritising Voices" discusses the benefits and methodological challenges of researching the development of learner autonomy. Excerpting the data from a case study that she carried out in a UK higher education institution, O'Leary examines the benefits of using a postmodernist approach, demonstrates how it can be applied in practice, and provides new insight into qualitative research on the development of learner autonomy.

In the fifth paper, "Qualitative Research Methods in Second Language Learning: Review and Evaluation," Clare F. Kaneko explicates qualitative research methods together with her reflection of her first-time experience of conducting a qualitative research study. As a student-researcher, Kaneko engaged in an action research project concerning her Japanese university students' use of smart phones in English classes. While describing her own experiences, she shares various aspects of her decision-making processes regarding the research methods, tools, and selection of participants in a chronological order and the struggles and issues she faced throughout the whole research project are discussed in a reflective manner, which will be a significant cornerstone for her future studies.

Our final paper, before the conclusion provided by Gary Barkhuizen, is Fergal Bradley and Leena Karlsson's "Storytelling for Learning and Healing: Parallel Narrative Inquiries in Language Counselling." Both Bradley and Karlsson engage in collaborative writing and demonstrate the narrative nature of counselling and learning, Bradley, linking to the idea of healing, and Karlsson providing an example of how the narrative approach to counselling helped one student with overcoming language anxiety. They describe their language counselling with an emphasis on its parallel nature, which not only helps the learner to overcome difficulties but also leads them to professional development. The dialogic narrative they chose for this paper itself implies the importance of storytelling as well as the powerful role that narrative counselling plays in the field of language counselling and language learning.

Taken together, then, the papers in this volume each offer their own answers to the questions we shared in formulating the theme of qualitative research into learner development. Nevertheless, it seems clear that all of these researchers place a prominent emphasis on the voices of their research participants. Thus, the studies find various ways to capture participant voices, often in narrative form. Gallagher and Hooper both use written assignments as a way to both explore their learner's experiences and build rapport with them, while Moriya

uses recordings. Kaneko's discussion of the problems she encountered using a "think aloud protocol" underline the fact that capturing voices itself is far from straight forward.

Notably, the focus on participants' voices is a very different position from quantitative research where participants' contributions are framed within responses predetermined by the researcher and subsumed as numerical data. This "prioritizing of voices", explicit in the title of O'Leary's paper, also extends to the ways in which the researchers and writers open up their own voices of experience. Bradley and Karlsson overtly share their respective experiences of their counselling and learning context. Kaneko, Hooper and Moriya and to a lesser extent Gallagher and O'Leary also share the experiences and even insecurities associated with tackling a research project that are all too easily glossed over. The negotiation of voices was also something we faced as editors discussing the content and style of papers not only with the authors and reviewers but also with members of the journal's steering group who provided detailed feedback and guidance on the final shape of the papers.

One of the aspirations of qualitative research is that enough of the researchers and participants' voices make it into the published article for readers to evaluate the projects in the light of their own experience. We have certainly enjoyed seeing these papers develop and the voices of the authors and their learners emerge and hope that they prove a valuable contribution to the literature on qualitative research in learner development.

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Editor Bios

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