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Preface: Language teacher cognition research in Japan today

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The journal, *Language Teacher Cognition Research Bulletin*, has been published since the academic year 2011/2012. So far we have put out 6 volumes and brought about tangible and significant achievements on language teacher cognition (LTC) that we are most concerned with when teaching English in the Japanese educational context and doing research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics. Each volume includes a variety of papers written in English or in Japanese and, as I have already discussed in the previous articles written in this journal, I believe it can certainly contribute to the expansion of the LTC research field. The current journal is the sixth volume, which incidentally has all the articles written in English. I am sure this tendency may be desirable because more people can read these English articles and understand what is happening among English teachers in Japan. Therefore, I have also decided to write this foreword in English as well in this volume. It is my hope that more teachers and researchers will know about our activities in JACET SIG on LTC.

I started this study group called JACET SIG on LTC (JACET (Japan Association of College English Teachers, a large organization of ELT researchers and teachers in Japan, has more than 40 SIGs (Special Interest Groups)) with some colleagues in 2007. In 2008, Simon Borg, who had inspired me to start LTC research, came to Japan for JACET Summer Seminar. Since then almost one decade has passed and LTC research in Japan has gradually become popular among SLA researchers, applied linguists, English

teachers and teacher educators who are not always satisfied with SLA research, in which teachers have been considered as variables and tended to be excluded in classroom research. In these 10 years' time since I began to do research on Japanese EFL teachers' cognitions, LTC research has become more diverse and is transitioning into a more complex phase. As Kubanyiova & Feryok (2015, pp. 435-436) state in *The Modern Language Journal*, 99, 3, which features current issues of LTC:

... language teacher cognition, a branch of applied linguistics concerned with investigating “the unobservable dimension of language teaching” (Borg, 2003, p. 81), has arrived at a crossroads. On the one hand, rapidly expanding research activity has continued to illuminate complex inner dynamics underlying language teachers' work. The findings have shown that language teachers' practices are shaped in unique and often unpredictable ways by the invisible dimension of teachers' mental lives that have emerged from teachers' diverse personal and language learning histories, language teacher education experiences, and the specific contexts in which they do or learn to do their work. On the other hand, however, limited progress has been achieved in addressing some of the most pertinent questions asked by applied linguists, policy makers, and general public alike: How do language teachers create meaningful learning environments for their students? How can teacher education, continuing professional development, and the wider educational and sociocultural context facilitate such learning in language teachers? To us, the co-editors of this special issue, these questions constitute the central project of language education research to which the study of language teacher cognition

should aspire to contribute.

Although at that time, I also thought that LTC research would be necessary for teachers to rethink about English language teaching and teacher education, I still wonder to what extent this research could actually contribute to English teachers or teacher educators. We further need to share ideas with other teachers, teacher educators and researchers who are engaging in different educational contexts. In other words, teachers should exchange their micro classroom knowledge and experiences with each other and identify complex dynamic phases of their teacher decision-making procedures and practices in the classroom as well as their own teacher development processes.

This journal is published on an open access basis, which means that anyone can access and read any articles in this journal for free. All articles are approved or authorized by professional reviewers, so a substantial number of researchers and teachers have thus far read and referred to them in SLA or applied linguistics research fields. I believe that LTC is a branch of SLA or applied linguistics and it can be a bridge between teachers and researchers. In my own teaching experience, I sometimes assume most teachers think that researchers do not know well about real teachers' classroom practices. On the other hand, according to my own experience as a researcher, I felt that most researchers tend to think teachers are not interested in theoretical or experimental scientific research. Of course, these are my personal observations and do not hold true for all teachers or researchers.

I, as a chair of JACET SIG on LTC, would also like to argue that LTC research should be conducted for the development of English education in Japan, which has been criticized for its effectiveness in teaching English at school for the past 200 years. The

most often cited concern is that Japanese teachers of English do not speak English in class or cannot teach practical English skills. Thus, many Japanese people cannot use English in their work partly due to English teachers' competence and aptitude. The Japanese government has therefore encouraged English teachers to use English in class and help their students to be able to attain sufficient English language knowledge and skills before graduating from university. Although the Ministry of Education (MEXT) shows that it supports teachers and endorses their professional development, it is not concerned about teachers' mental lives or teacher *kokoro*, which I refer to as complex aspects of teacher cognition (Sasajima, 2014). It is necessary that LTC research consider teachers' emotional inner life as well.

Lightbown (2000, p. 454) states that 'SLA research findings do not constitute the only or even the principal source of information to guide teachers in their daily practice of the art and science of second and foreign language teaching. Teachers will make their decisions on their basis of many different factors. That has always been true.' SLA research has contributed significantly to language learning and teaching, but it has missed the aspect of the teacher's role. Communicative language teaching (CLT), which was introduced into Japan in the 1980s, has also influenced English language teaching (ELT) in Japan as well as in other Asian countries. Certainly ELT in Japan has gradually shifted to learners' development of English communicative competence and the evidence-based approach based on the scientific data, such as learner language, interlanguage, error analysis, and discourse analysis. Researchers may have come to understand more about the process of language learning, but how about teachers? Thanks to SLA research and applied linguistics, some teachers may have made use of several theories and ideas, such as corrective feedback and focus on form, changing

their teaching methods or classroom activities, but what about the numerous other teachers? Can they change or enhance their teaching? As Lightbown says, teachers make their decisions and make use of their ideas in their own classrooms, but their decision-making processes can be very complex and nobody can see their inner world.

So far, I have argued that teachers need to become teacher researchers. The role of a researcher is essentially that of a scientist. However, the role of a teacher researcher is much more multifaceted. In addition to being a researcher, teacher researchers are also practitioners and educators. I, as a teacher researcher, always think about two aspects of teacher research: the teacher and the researcher. I believe it is the primary purpose of JACET SIG on LTC. The current version includes the following articles, all of which were talked and discussed in LTC seminar and then published here with additional research. Each article discusses different issues of Japanese local contexts, such as preservice teacher education, reflective practice, CLT, and primary and secondary teacher education.

- Cognition and Language-in-Education Policy Implementation in Japan: New Perspectives in Teachers' Interpretations of the Senior High School Course of Study (Gregory Paul Glasgow)
- Towards the Integration of Grammar Teaching with Communicative Work: A Case Study of a Japanese Senior High School English Teacher (Paul Underwood)
- Japanese teacher and assistant teacher accounts of primary-secondary links in English education (Sean Mahoney)
- Critical inquiry into critical reflection: Situated in the Japanese context (Atsuko Watanabe)
- Second language poetry writing as reflective practice: A poetic inquiry into a pre-service teacher's experience of English language learning (Atsushi Iida)
- Interviewing CLIL lecturers in Japan: Different Discourses (Keiko Tsuchiya)
- A Teacher Development Program for Primary English Teachers in Italy: A Blended Approach to Learning English and Language Teaching Methodology (Noriko Ishihara & Cristina Richieri)

I am sure that these articles will contribute to LTC research, which I believe can serve as a bridge between language teachers and researchers in practical ways, especially in the complex Japanese educational system where primary and secondary school teachers have a heavy workload, compared to teachers in other countries. Japanese teachers of English cannot always think about their classroom teaching or develop their professional knowledge. They have to cope with the next day's lesson planning and cannot afford to do research or have time to reflect on their teaching. Some even criticize scientific research results and just believe in their own prior learning experiences. Therefore, in many cases, there are big gaps between language teachers and SLA researchers (or applied linguists). We should think more about these complex problems and try to find solutions, one at a time.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members for supporting the activities of JACET SIG on LTC. And I am especially thankful to Yoshiaki Ehara and Akinobu Shimura for editing this Journal since the first edition together with me. I am very honored to have coordinated this study group for the past decade. My role will soon end but I hope LTC research will continue in the field of applied linguistics.

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Activity records from October 2015 to July 2016/11/06

General research theme as of 2015 to 2016

Theory and practice of language teacher cognition research in Japan

Events

23rd LTC seminar

Date: October 24th, 2015 2 to 5 pm

Venue: Waseda University Bld. 3 Room 405

Presenters:

Sean Mahoney (Fukushima University)

The shaping of ‘foreign language activity’ classes: Thoughts from primary homeroom, ALT, and junior high teachers”

Atsuko Watanabe (International Christian University)

Critical inquiry into critical reflection: situated in the Japanese context

24th LTC seminar

Date: January 23rd, 2016 2 to 5 pm

Venue: Toyo Eiwa University (Roppongi) Room 205

Presenters:

Keiko Tsuchiya (Tokai University)

Interviewing CLIL lecturers in higher education in Japan: a qualitative analysis

Yuki Yamano (Utsunomiya University)

これからの小学校英語教育におけるCLILの役割－その可能性と課題を
探る(English CLIL in primary education – the future possibility and
issues to assess)

25th LTC seminar

Date: April 30th, 2016 2 to 5 pm

Venue: Toyo Eiwa University (Roppongi) Room 201

Presenters:

Ami Yamauchi (Daito Bunka University)

CLTにまつわる高校教員の信念と実践における苦難を探る
(Exploring Japanese high school English teachers' beliefs and practices regarding CLT)

Tomoko Watanabe (Showa Women's University)

Combining research into teacher beliefs with a corpus-based study to discuss pedagogical implications of the corpus-based findings in language education

LTC Special Lecture

Date: July 16th, 2016 2 to 5 pm

Venue: Toyo Eiwa University (Roppongi) Room 201

Presenter:

Larisa Kasumagic-Kafedzic (Sarajevo University)

Intercultural Approach to English Language Teaching: Teacher Education and Classroom Implications in Bosnia and Herzegovina

26th LTC seminar

Date: July 23rd, 2016 2 to 5 pm

Venue: Waseda University Bld. 3 Room 704

Presenters:

Katsuya Yokomoto (Rikkyo University)

EFL teachers' interests and beliefs as determiners of their instructional decisions in the teaching of pronunciation

Kyoko Oi (Seisen Women's University)

中高英語教員のライティングに関する教師認知—日本・韓国・台湾の英語教員対象比較調査から(EFL teachers' cognitions about writing – from the teacher survey in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan)

1st Qualitative Research Consortium in English Education (QRCEE)

Date: November 7th, 2015 2 to 5 pm

Venue: Toyo Eiwa University (Roppongi) Room 201

Presenter: Masuko Miyahara (International Christian University)

Coordinator: Shigeru Sasajima (Toyo Eiwa University)

Workshop: ワークショップ：事例をもとにナラティブアプローチの手法を考える (Considering Narrative Approaches based on cases)

2nd Qualitative Research Consortium in English Education (QRCEE)

Date: December 12th, 2015 2 to 5 pm

Venue: Toyo Eiwa University (Roppongi) Room 201

Presenter: Paul Dowling (UCL Institute of Education, University College London)

Lecture & workshop: Qualitative Approaches and Methods in Social Research

Coordinators: Atsuko Watanabe (International Christian University), Shigeru Sasajima (Toyo Eiwa University)

3rd Qualitative Research Consortium in English Education (QRCEE)

Date: March 12th, 2016 1 to 4 pm

Venue: Toyo Eiwa University (Roppongi) Room 201

Presenters:

Ken Tamai (Kobe City University of Foreign Studies)

実践者による質的英語教育研究：Reflective practiceをめぐる理論と方法、その問題点 (Practitioners' qualitative English education research: theory and methods on reflective practice, and the issues)

Robert Croker (Nanzan University)

Doing ethical qualitative research

Coordinators: Atsuko Watanabe, Masuko Miyahara (International Christian University), and Shigeru Sasajima (Toyo Eiwa University)

Cognition and Language-in-Education Policy Implementation in Japan: New Perspectives in Teachers' Interpretations of the Senior High School *Course of Study*

Gregory Paul Glasgow
NYU School of Professional Studies, Tokyo Center

Abstract

While research literature in TESOL has explored and unearthed the complexities of language teacher cognition (LTC), establishing it as virtually its own subfield, and acknowledges how context meditates cognitions, rarely has LTC, as it pertains to language-in-education policy (LEP), been explicitly theorized. This article endeavors to introduce *cognition in policy implementation* (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002) as a theoretical base through which to reflect on how language teachers come to make sense of LEP, which could serve as an illustrative tool to conceptualize the disconnect between policy and pedagogy. This article proposes a tripartite framework that recognizes the centrality of the individual cognition of the teacher, the social situation through which he or she negotiates LEP, and his or her ability to make sense of policy recommendations and requirements, which may be in conflict with context and classroom practice and reveal his or her professional learning needs. I draw on findings from my dissertation research in Japan and determine how teachers could be best supported as they struggle to implement policy reforms that may seem far from feasible in practice from what they already know, believe and do.

INTRODUCTION

The notion that proficiency in English has become a necessity in an increasingly globalised world is recognized as a truism by some, and clichéd by others. As recent volumes have argued in detail, “the extreme favoring of English has led various governments to introduce the language as the medium of instruction even when children do not use it at home” (Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016, p. 3). This has led Asian authorities to pinpoint “grave concerns related to ELT”(Sung, 2015, p. 1) when it comes to implementing reform policies at the school level through curricula, methodology, assessment and teacher practice. Enmeshed in these complexities are the teachers themselves; while Schmidt and Datnow (2005) argue that “[t]eachers are considered by most policymakers and school change experts to be the centerpiece of educational change” (p. 949), it can also be argued that all too often they are *not*. Conversely, teachers are left to their own devices to interpret policy reform and are all too frequently not supplied with the requisite pre- or in- service education, and resources through learning and assessment materials. Even though English education in Asia, especially Japan, where the policy discourses of “international English” and “communication” have remained consistent in spite of teacher non-implementation, less attention has been paid to how teacher come to terms with English education policy reform through their own

cognitions. In addition, less of an effort has been made to create a systematic solution to guide teachers through such difficult times, where what they know, believe and do is called into question, with policymakers asking them to change what they do, what they believe and what they know with little contextual and institutional support.

Never has the disconnect between policy and pedagogy reached a juncture as critical as it has in Japan. Currently, the *English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization* (MEXT, 2014) requires that English teachers conduct English classes as a subject for 5th and 6th grade elementary school (with exposure to English as foreign language activities in 3rd and 4th grade), and conduct English classes principally in English for junior high school and also in senior English classes, where there is more emphasis on high-level linguistic activities such as debates, discussions and presentations. However, the question remains as to how or whether teachers will receive the necessary professional guidance to carry out their expected roles. Indeed, the notion of whether teachers believe that they can implement English language-in-education policy (LEP) reform in Japan is not a new topic; several researchers have commented on teachers' lack of ability to implement such reforms due to policy-pedagogy disconnects in past literature (Gorsuch, 2000; Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Koike & Tanaka, 1995; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Underwood, 2012). However, in order to comprehend teachers' complexities in perceiving their roles in policy implementation in a more systematic fashion, I propose linking policy implementation to cognition by taking into consideration three important factors: *policy representations, institutional context, and teacher cognition* (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). As I have argued elsewhere (Glasgow & Paller, 2016) this tripartite framework situates the cognition of the teacher within wider, specific contextual considerations which may militate against a teacher's perception of his or her agency in the policy reform process.

In this article and in consideration of the framework above, I examine the current *Course of Study for Foreign Languages* for upper secondary school, in which English classes are expected to be conducted in English (MEXT, 2011). I look at the representation of the policy through its associated texts and discourses, and I examine how it is ultimately received by two teachers – one Japanese teacher of English and one native-English speaking teacher – in relation to their own personal beliefs and institutional contexts. Through the application of this framework, I hope to contribute to perspectives on language teacher cognition by providing a deeper understanding of how language teachers engage with policy directives based on their beliefs, knowledge and professional experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Context in Language Teacher Cognition

It is useful to review the role of context in language teacher cognition to determine how language teachers respond to its impact. According to Borg (2006), “the social, institutional instructional and physical settings in which teachers work have a major impact on their practices” (p. 275), and these factors can indeed constrain what teachers do and how they think about their work. This impact is significant when taking into consideration LEP reform, specifically when there is a lack of congruence between what reform policies declare and how teachers actually think that they can respond to them. Borg updated his representation of the processes and elements of language teacher cognition in which he began to “position contextual factors in teaching around classrooms, rather than just external to it” (p. 282) with the classroom becoming part of the context. Context is a mediating factor which influences cognitions and ultimately practice. It can, according to Borg, cause tensions between classroom practices and teacher cognitions, or it can prompt changes in cognitions. A visual representation of Borg’s construct (2006) is below:

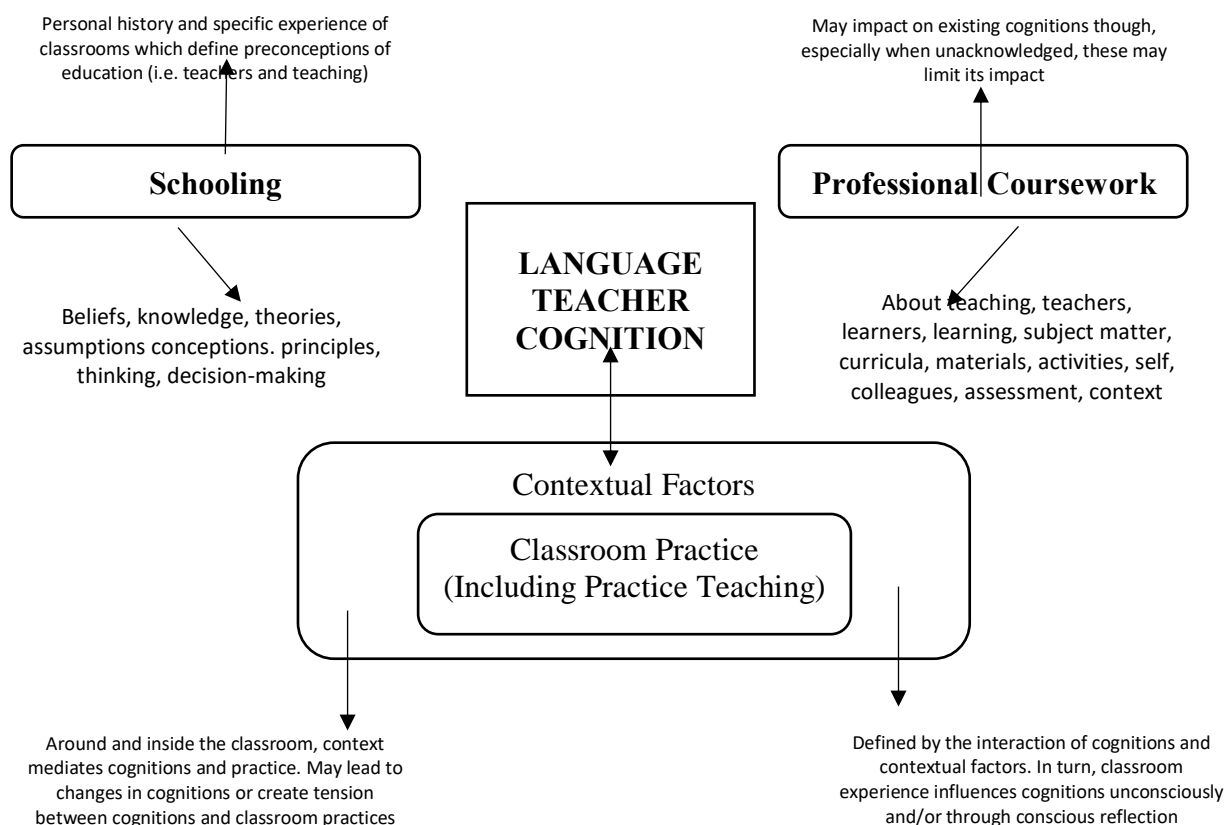


Figure 1: Elements in Language Teacher Cognition (Borg, 2006)

This characterization of elements and processes is a significant step towards acknowledging the role of context in language teacher cognition. Points that are particularly salient are the assertions that context is a mediating and tension-creating factor, with classroom experience and school culture influencing cognitions as outlined above. One particular aspect of this context –the process of LEP reform – warrants more attention in terms of conceptualizing how policy processes affect the cognition of a language teacher, particularly those that require teachers to reform their teaching methods, as we have seen in Japan over the past three decades.

Cognition and LEP Implementation

With the intensification of policy reforms in Japan, as evidenced by the new MEXT reform plan to coincide with the 2020 Olympics, it is fitting to begin relating policy processes to what teachers know, think and do. In their influential volume on the negotiation of language policies, Menken and García (2010) bring attention to a new wave in policy implementation research that focuses on human agency in implementation and appropriation processes, also recognized by Johnson (2010), with *implementation* reflecting what teachers do in response to policy and *appropriation* reflecting how teachers may shape policies to fix their contexts – if they do at all. Menken and García refer to the work of Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez (2006) in which they recognize the role of individual cognition (relating to teachers own experiences and personal identity) and social cognition (related to the situation in which the teacher finds him or herself) in intersecting to shape how teachers respond to language-in-education policies. I propose the framework of Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) to explore in particular three stages at which how language teachers may engage with LEP (See Figure 2 below).

First, Spillane et al. (2002) consider policy representations as a key factor. To relate this construct to the English LEP reforms that have taken place in Japan. The *Course of Study* policy documents, ministry-approved textbooks, website information pertaining to policy goals and or any other official governmental information that frames the rationale for the reforms to take place can be considered to be representations of the reforms sought. These representations, or policy texts, have their own discourses as they pertain to what are considered “best methods” and “best practice” in language teaching, and who may or may not be best equipped to serve as a language teacher. Practical examples of this may be the positioning of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an ideal practice, along with native English-speaking teachers as ideally equipped to employ communicative methods

when teaching students - assumptions that may or may not be found in policy texts. Other tangible representations may be how CLT is represented in ministry-approved textbook activities. Representations of policy intersect with the cognitions of language teachers in a way that enables them (or not) to perceive their agency in the implementation of new reforms.

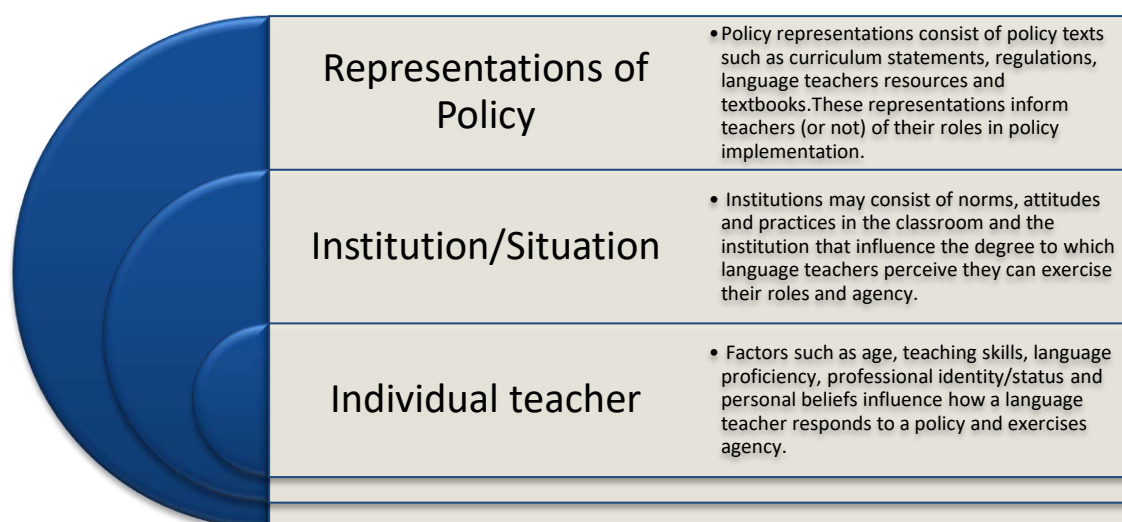


Figure 2: Sociocultural Model of Cognition in Policy Implementation (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002)

Secondly, they consider the situation in which they are in. The institution where the language teacher works may consist of particular norms or practices that have the potential to influence a teacher's stance on whether he or she can implement policy reform. Teachers' colleagues, materials, and pressures such as the need for the institution's need to maintain a strong educational reputation can all provide a context in which teachers' perception of their ability to comply with an educational reform may be affected. Thirdly, individual teachers' perceptions of their professional development and knowledge, their professional identity, and personal beliefs about their field have an effect on their agency in policy implementation.

In sum, I concur with Menken and García regarding the fact that teachers do play a large role in LEP implementation; however, in addition to individual and social cognition, I would like to emphasize the importance of policy representation as an area of focus, as it is teachers' responses to what they are positioned to do as stated in official policy documents that may trigger certain teacher responses to the policy that has been declared.

Conducting English Classes in English in Japan: Reforms in Language-in-Education Policy

I will engage in a brief discussion of ELT reform in Japan (see Heinrichsen, 1989) for a more comprehensive historical discussion) and relate it to the recent changes to the Course of Study for Foreign Languages for senior high schools. I argue that over the history of English education in Japan, tensions have always existed between the need for more practical, oral target language (TL) use, and the more traditional reading and translation based approaches that were primarily used to acquire knowledge. Such an assertion has major implications for English LEP reforms in as communicative approaches that suggest more TL use seem to have been adopted in rhetoric, but the extent to which it is practiced is far from clear.

It is relevant to consider that ELT innovation in Japan, with the founding of the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) program in 1987 (McConnell, 2000), focused on the development of oral communication skills and the increase of “international understanding” amongst Japanese youth through team-teaching by native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) who serve as assistant language teachers (ALTs) and Japanese teachers of English (JTEs). The JET programme was meant to at least increase collaboration between JTEs and NESTs, as well as somehow increase English use in the classroom; however, the extent to which this has been successful, although lauded by some (Wada, 2002) has yet to be specified. Indeed, very few empirical studies have investigated the success of team-teaching through the familiarity teachers obtain with teaching English in English.

The next major language-in-education policy decision was the inception of the “Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities” (MEXT, 2003). Research on the Action Plan has examined its details as well as assumptions surrounding it (Butler & Iino, 2005; Hashimoto, 2009; Hato, 2005). Describing the full plan is beyond space restrictions here. However, the Action Plan’s general objectives were to teach more English classes through the medium of English, improve teacher ability, enhance motivation for learning English, establish a teacher evaluation system, implement English activities in elementary school, improve Japanese language abilities and expand practical research on language teaching (Butler & Iino, 2005), with the Super English Language High School (SELhi) program.

Central tenets of the Action Plan seem to correspond with axiomatic assumptions about language learning and language education that are fairly established and that reflect “imperialist” fallacies in English language teaching (Phillipson, 1992). Some of these are

commonly known as the *early-start fallacy* (the best time to learn English is at a young age), *the subtractive fallacy* (if English isn't used standards will drop), and the *maximum exposure fallacy* (the more English is used, the more it is acquired). It was in the Action Plan that it was mentioned that the majority of an English class should be conducted in English and elementary school education was emphasized. These fallacies are influential and may serve as the basic assumptions that underscore English education policy discourse. Furthermore, the Action Plan has experienced criticism for not incorporating enough input for ideas from the ELT practitioners, or the local policymakers such as teachers, administrators and researchers (Hato, 2005). As few studies have been written about its efficacy, six years later, it is unclear as to the Action Plan's actual success.

The new *Course of Study* changed the roster of English classes after the purported lack of success of the Oral Communication courses mandated under previous reforms (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). MEXT thus proposed the creation of "English Communication" classes to improve integrated skills, and "English Expressions" classes to boost student ability to logically and spontaneously express themselves in English (MEXT, 2011). These classes are to be conducted "through English", as is stated repeatedly through the policy documents since the launch of the reform in 2013. However, with these changes, key problems remain. With the persistence of the gap between policy and pedagogy (LoCastro, 1996; Seargeant, 2008), questions remain as to how such courses will be successfully realized in high schools in a contextually and culturally relevant way, given the contextual pressures that teachers face. This proposed study hopes to highlight issues in the policy documents and explore how teachers perceive them.

To conclude, globalization has increased the scope of ELT innovation to encourage more communicative language teaching methods and TL use through English LEP reform. Indeed, for example, Hong Kong faced such issues in 1997 as proponents of English-medium instruction reacted *against* the return to Chinese medium instruction in the education system. In South Korea, Teaching English through English classrooms in primary and secondary schools were encouraged in 2001 (Nunan, 2003). In Japan, the literature has insisted on a "gap" between the rhetoric of reform with respect to classroom communicative methods and the realities faced by its expected practitioners, which provides an opportunity to consider the framework of Spillane et al. (2002) and the centrality of teacher cognition in policy implementation.

Methodology

Adopting a sequential explanatory research design (Dornyei, 2007), in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected respectively, the data presented here will come from semi-structured interviews conducted with one Japanese teacher of English (JTE), a 35 year-old private high school teacher named Terumasa (name is a pseudonym) in his mid 30s, and one native English-speaking teacher (NEST) named Earl (also a pseudonym), also in his mid-30s. These teachers both worked in private senior high schools in Kanagawa and Tokyo prefecture respectively. While Terumasa is a full-time teacher, Earl is a solo teacher hired by a local teaching dispatch agency. Terumasa received an MA in TESOL from an international university, and often tried to introduce new concepts in teaching to his colleagues in his institution, a mid-level academic senior high school. Earl was an agency-hired NEST who taught oral communication classes at his institution. I wanted to include the perspectives of teachers who spent considerable time at their institutions so that I could hopefully get fairly informed perspectives of their role perceptions when it comes to policy implementation. I also wanted to get a sense of how NESTs and JTEs interpreted policy change. Having the perspective of a NEST who teaches solo is also useful due to the unchallenged assumption suggested by the maximum exposure fallacy discussed previously in which NESTs are considered a conduit through which to “expose” Japanese students to as much English as possible. I thought that it could be illuminating to determine how Earl, as a NEST, perceives his efforts to conduct his classes in English in view of the policy changes.

The research conducted originated from my doctoral dissertation in which it was a multilevel analysis at the level of situation (school context) individual (teacher) and policy representation (national curriculum guidelines and textbooks). At the level of policy representations I examined the Course of Study for Foreign Languages documents (MEXT, 2011), and current team teaching resources for insights on how NEST roles may have changed (CLAIR, 2012), and analyzed the voices of teachers who articulate their beliefs and practices in their institutions. One limitation of the study is that private senior high schools are not obligated to follow the *Course of Study for Foreign Languages*; however, often private high schools have the autonomy to hire NESTs flexibly and to organize their curricula in innovative ways through accelerated English courses (Aspinall, 2006) and as solo teachers, which is why it is worth determining how NESTs respond to LEP.

The semi-structured interviews centered on teachers’ interpretations of the national curriculum, in which senior high school teachers are to conduct English classes in English in Japan. Applying the tripartite framework I discussed earlier (Spillane et al., 2002), I consider

how teacher cognition is affected at the levels of policy representation, situation, and individual by asking questions to them about their understandings of the current Course of Study. Also, I encouraged responses about how these two teachers interacted with their colleagues, which unearthed valuable information about school culture as it adopts – or ignores reform. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Lichtman, 2010), a method associated with grounded theory where recurring data is compared and categorized, and where theory is generated. I categorized the data as it appeared and related it to the three levels mentioned earlier. Transcripts were made and sent to the participants in order to double-check the veracity of their comments and in order to ensure trustworthiness of the data.

Results

Policy Representations: Contradictions, Ambiguity and the Status Quo?

Firstly, even though the senior high school curriculum stated changes to some school subjects (for example, subjects such as *English I* and *English II* in the previous *Course of Study* were renamed *English Communication I* and *English Communication II*), it was clear that the subject contents as explained in the current Course of Study were not radically different. Because of the tendency to use similar wording in the Course of Study, the question is raised as to whether teachers will be able to re-conceptualize the subjects as “communicative”; after all, according to MEXT (2011) in the current Course of Study, “[g]rammar instruction should be given as a means to support communication through effective linkage with language activities” (p. 7). An example of this language is provided in examples from the previous and current Courses of Study for English I and English Communication I:

English I (previous Course of Study)

1 Objectives

To develop students’ basic ability to **understand what they listen to or read and to convey information, ideas etc. by speaking or writing in English**, and to foster a positive attitude towards communication through dealing with everyday topics (MEXT, 2002, p. 109, emphasis mine).

English Communication I (Current Course of Study)

1 Objectives

To develop students’ basic abilities such as **accurately understanding and appropriately conveying information, ideas etc.**, while **fostering a positive attitude toward communication through the English language** (MEXT, 2011, p. 1, emphasis mine).

It may be argued that the language of English Communication I seems more oriented towards communication due to the fact that the phrase “understand what they listen to or

read” is removed from the previous version. But the minor nature of the change may lead to the proposition that nothing significant in the curriculum is meant to be changed at all. As Johnson (2011) asserted, the intertextual links and differences in language policy texts can “illuminate a potential pedagogical or ideological shift” (p. 271). This may be the effect that MEXT wants to create with the way that the English Communication I subject is described and represented. However, if the language of the current MEXT policy texts fails to be clearly distinguishable from that of the previous texts, then will teachers be able to determine how their roles are to change? These textual issues can have implications when it comes to teacher cognition, but only if teachers familiarize themselves with the curriculum guidelines.

Teaching English, in English, In Principle

The ambiguous nature of the provision that English is to be taught in English is another problematic area. While the provisional English version of the MEXT document (MEXT, 2011) points out that English classes have to be conducted in English, in order to transform classes into communicative scenes, the Course of Study Explanation (MEXT, 2010) stated that Japanese *can* be used as long as the focus was on promoting communication through English. In addition, the provisional English version states that “[c]onsideration should be given to use English *in accordance with the students’ level of comprehension*” (MEXT, 2011, p. 7, emphasis mine). When I asked Terumasa about whether he perceived that this initiative could indeed be implemented successfully, he was unsure; he felt that the language of the policy left teachers with a sort of “escape hatch”, or “back door”:

“and the other thing that the government included for the course of study that it depends on the situation. The teachers, my colleagues take it as a very strong statement. ...***it depends on the situation***...in our situation we do not have to do it, we do not.” (Terumasa, Interview, March 2011, emphasis mine)

The “strong statement” he refers to is the suggestion of English being used in accordance with learner comprehension, where teachers can re-interpret and make sense of the new policies to fit in line with their existing, beliefs, assumptions and practices. In other words, Terumasa’s colleagues, especially if they do not teach in English, can simply continue to “use Japanese to teach English”, thereby interpreting and recontextualizing the policy requirements very liberally and using the policy as a “back door” to resist the new ideas altogether. When Terumasa states that “it depends on the situation”, he refers to the ambiguity found in the national guidelines (in accordance with the students’ level). By stating that “in our situation we do not have to do it”, he meant that since the teachers tend to use

Japanese most of the time in their classrooms, that they would interpret the policy in a way that allows them to maintain the status quo, and hence *not* make an effort to use more English.

What is the Role of the Native Speaker?

The team teaching resources (MEXT, 2002; CLAIR, 2012) that existed during the time leading up to the 2013 rollout of the current Course of Study did not change in alignment with the provisional document of the new Course of Study. The new MEXT Handbook for Team Teaching (MEXT, 2013) was released after the beginning of the school year in April 2013, which led one to wonder the degree to which native English-speaking teachers were meant to be an integral resource in the implementation of the new curriculum. One major issue is the fact that ALTs and other NESTs are not necessarily trained in second language writing pedagogy or TESOL for that matter, which has ramifications for the “English Expressions” I and II courses, in which communicative speaking and writing are meant to be the central focus. The CLAIR ALT Handbook provides the following comment:

“Due to **the relative complication of teaching writing** it is perhaps better to stick to the modest goal of making your students comfortable communicating in writing in a foreign language. **You will have to carefully examine your textbooks and talk with your teachers to identify opportunities to do so.** The ubiquitous “letter” reading passage found in most high school and junior high school texts is always a good place to start as **it provides an easy model for students to follow.**” (CLAIR, 2012, p. 46, emphasis mine)

The problem with this assumption of “writing” as “relatively complicated” does not align with the centrality of writing as seen in the English Expressions subjects, especially in English Expressions II, in which students are expected to write with “due attention to passage structure, relation to charts and tables, expressions, etc., while clarifying the points of the argument, evidence, etc., and reviewing and revising one's own writing” (MEXT, 2011, p. 4). Without advance preparation for this requirement in a manner that allows NESTs and JTEs to collaborate together meaningfully and consider curriculum structure as well as writing assessment, JTEs and NESTs will miss an important opportunity to enhance learners' communication skills beyond just speaking. This is the case not only for NESTs who teach solo in some schools, but ALTs in team-teaching as well.

As shown in this section, the issues with ambiguity in policy representations when it comes to policy texts and teachers' resources can make it frustrating for teachers to conceptualize how to position themselves in the implementation of the Course of Study – if

they do indeed try to read about what they are supposed to do at all. When policy is misrepresented or poorly articulated, buy-in from teachers is at risk. This also leads to issues surrounding textbooks. As there have been several studies that have mentioned discrepancies between textbook activities in ministry-approved textbooks and the language of the Course of Study (LoCastro, 1997; McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005; Ogura, 2008), if teachers cannot make sense of reforms by clearly understanding how they are represented in textbooks, then it bodes ill for implementation as well.

Individual and Social Cognitions: The Voices of Terumasa and Earl

In this section, I present several excerpts from interviews with Terumasa, one of the JTE respondents and Earl, an NEST. These two respondents are salient examples of how teachers make sense of the curriculum requirements, and, in turn, reflect on their teaching beliefs in the contexts where they work, further revealing the connection between cognition and policy implementation.

Policy and Teaching Context

It is important to realize how the contexts in which the two teachers work intersect with their beliefs and reactions to the current Course of Study. With respect to Terumasa, the announcement of the curriculum in the years leading up to 2013 only seemed to highlight even more the chasm that existed between himself and his colleagues. He positioned himself as an innovator, using cooperative learning techniques in his classes and trying to spread knowledge about ELT pedagogy at his school by bringing teaching books to work for colleagues to read. However, he framed his colleagues as teachers who view “school” as “home”; in other words, the culture of the school was such that teachers could feel disinclined to promote more professionalism. Rather, it became a place where teachers could just teach as they have taught regardless of any policy reforms:

“the teachers who have been at my school for 30 years, they know everything about my school so they can just come to school and do nothing...sit in the classroom and go home.”
(Terumasa, Interview, March 2011)

He also commented that while he felt that the Course of Study was “nice”, he believed that “teachers are the problem”, meaning that they are likely to stymie implementation of reform through inaction and resistance.

Earl's context with respect to LEP reform is also complicated by his teaching situation. As an agency worker, essentially, Earl saw his role as quite separate from his JTE colleagues, which had implications in terms of implementation of the curriculum:

“... that would be nice to work with a Japanese teacher that would be the expert and they...we could mold the curriculum more cause right now there's no communication ...*I have no idea what they're doing. No idea.*” (Earl, Interview, February 2011, emphasis mine)

This sense of having “no idea” what the Japanese teacher is doing presents problems when it comes to teacher collaboration and the establishment of a professional learning community. Before the new curriculum, Earl taught several oral communication classes at his school, however did not feel as if his classes had any connection to the wider English curriculum of the school; it was as if the school saw him, in his words, as a “babysitter”. In addition, Earl commented that there was the “frustration” of not having easier access to Japanese teachers to discuss student issues:

“To say can I have an hour...can I discuss what your plan is in 2 hours because I teach a 2nd year class. I never know the students until they show up. When I start school in April, or March, I say, ‘Ah these are my students, I know these ones, not good, not good, not somebody who should be taking this class’...*There's that kind of frustration.*” (Earl, Interview, February 2011, emphasis mine)

Therefore, Earl and Terumasa's comments underscore that there was a perceived lack of community felt in their contexts, which may work against any efforts to change teaching practices. In Terumasa's situation, complacency amongst his fellow colleagues is a situation he feels is problematic. In Earl's situation, his isolation from JTEs - though he did admit that he could try to make himself more accessible - adds to his frustration of not feeling that he can make a contribution.

Teacher Beliefs and Knowledge

With respect to making sense of the 2013 implementation of the senior high school curriculum, clearly the issue of “English classes conducted in English” evinced some strong opinions, which can also be seen in how Terumasa and Earl themselves articulated their opinions of such a philosophy of teaching.

In Terumasa's case, it was clear that he was comfortable with using Japanese in the classroom and rationalized his use of Japanese as enabling students to understand contents more ‘deeply’. In his point of view, not only was he responsible for helping students learn

English, but also to pass their classes so that they could be well-prepared for university entrance. However, he still found it reasonable to ask teachers officially to use English in class:

“Hmm...I think [it is reasonable] so because the situation in Korea or China, many schools try to use English in the classroom even though their teacher is a native Korean speaker or native Chinese speaker but they were successful (*sic*). But in the Japanese situation, still they do not want to implement all English class” (Terumasa, Interview, March 2011).

The fact of whether or not English LEP implementation in China or South Korea is “successful” can definitely be challenged (see Li, 2008; Choi, 2014); Terumasa appears to draw on a potentially faulty comparative perception where Japan is viewed to be lagging behind compared to its East Asian neighbors when it comes to English education, among other issues. Nevertheless, this is a belief that he has articulated, suggesting that Japan needs to boldly adopt reforms such as these in order to become more competitive in the world.

Earl, in a similar fashion, revealed comments that reflect his perceptions of self as a native English-speaking teacher. He frames the concept of “English classes in English” differently, however, taking note that he sees “the value” but not “the benefits” of an English-in-English approach:

...I see the value of all English but not the benefits of it yet...due to [the fact that] they don’t understand...it’s hard because sometimes I wonder if they’re liking it because of me or if they’re liking it because of what’s being taught. I get the impression sometimes that ...I think it’s because of me “they hate English but they like Earl”...so that’s how they perform in class (Earl, Interview, February 2011).

In other words, while he understands the principle of more exposure to English, he sees it to be pointless unless learners can adapt to the new practices and actually comprehend the classes. His “nativeness” does not automatically guarantee comprehension.

While Terumasa may have taken a critical stance against the Japanese situation, chastising JTEs for not taking more initiative to implement English LEP, Earl points out the implications of professional development when it comes to NESTs, and relates it to the current English curriculum. He discusses below how he was informed of the policy changes:

“From my supervisor, not my supervisor from the school but from the parent company or my contract company...but I had no idea..I said “really” then I asked my wife ...she said that they’re going to make everyone teach English classes in English...*that’s kind of what got me to start pursuing my Masters [degree]*...what am I going to do now if they get rid of OC [Oral Communication]?” (Earl, Interview, February 2011)

The aforementioned quote raises a suspicion that had existed among some NESTs that the senior high school *Course of Study*'s shift towards English classes conducted in English would cause NESTs to lose their jobs. However, Earl points out that he was influenced to start pursuing his Master's Degree because of the changes, which suggests that he, similar to several NESTs at times, feels that he is not as prepared professionally to teach as he would like to be. Earl's concerns raise the issue that NESTs cannot be ignored when it comes to providing professional development opportunities. While their identities as native English speakers may lead to the assumptions that they are "natural" at teaching English, their actual experiences may suggest that they too could use support in their professional preparation.

Discussions and Conclusion

Through the analysis of the current Course of Study for senior high school English education and the cognitions of Earl and Terumasa, it is shown that the tripartite framework for cognition and policy is an illustrative one that can unearth discrepancies, contradictions and contextual tensions that can play direct and indirect roles in influencing teachers' agency. Borg (2006) rightfully includes contextual factors and their influence on teacher cognition. By more clearly articulating what contextual factors consist of, which, in my opinion can be macro-level policy representations, meso-level teaching conditions and institutional cultures, we can then begin to unearth problems and contradictions in the articulation of a language education policy from how it is worded in policy texts, to the *de facto* practices that exist – and persist – in schools.

With respect to policy representations, it is clearly shown how disconnects and vagueness in statements does not assist teachers at all, especially if they are meant to change a way of teaching that has been familiar to them for quite some time. On the contrary, a coherent and cohesive set of resources from policy statements, down to team-teaching resources and textbooks would be better if they were all consistently communicating the same idea. In fact, it can be argued that language education policies can be misrepresented in textbooks, (see Kennedy & Tomlinson, 2013) especially if textbook publishers are inconsistent with how they all interpret the requirements being established by the Ministry of Education.

In terms of the context of the teacher, if macro-level policy representations are not effectively translated to meso-level institutional contexts, in which the policies are essentially put into practice by how teachers structure and deliver their school syllabi, then how can change be expected to occur? Put another way, macro-level representations of policy may

serve well to show teachers how the department can function at the meso-level, provide guidance in carrying through reforms at the syllabus level, and foster a culture of collegiality necessary for reforms to happen. This process would hopefully give teachers the chance to believe that reforms can work.

Finally, teachers can take charge of their situation individually by compensating for their lack of preparedness by seeking professional development opportunities on their own, whether this is through study groups, teaching associations or certificate and degree programs offered by universities. It is always the case that new reforms may highlight potential gaps in teacher knowledge, and if teachers are sufficiently prepared through macro-level governmental initiatives to meso-level institutional seminars that provide rationales for reform, then teachers may be more apt to accept realities of reform and possess agency in implementation. As Shohamy (2009) opines, there is a “match or mismatch between idealized language policies “on paper” and the practical reality derived from the evidence of personal experience” (p. 186).

This paper has attempted to establish connections between language teacher cognition and language education policy, by taking into consideration a tripartite framework to analyze representation, situation, and teacher cognition when it comes to the articulation of language-in-education policies. I was able to show that macro-level policy representation and meso-level institutional practice intersect in creating the contextual factors which may prevent LEP reform from being effectively translated into practice. However, with the promotion of new initiatives that create conditions for professional learning such as school-based professional development opportunities or more government-sponsored teacher training programs, there remains hope that when teachers are asked to teach differently through governmental policy, that they will at least **receive** more supportive, specific and cohesive guidance in terms of what “teaching differently” entails.

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Towards the Integration of Grammar Teaching with Communicative Work: A Case Study of a Japanese Senior High School English Teacher

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Abstract

Japan's national curriculum for senior high schools, the Course of Study 2009 for Foreign Languages: English (MEXT, 2009), was enacted in April 2013. This paper describes the case of Takako, a public, senior high school teacher, and is drawn from a larger multiple case-study of Japanese senior high school teacher beliefs and practices (Underwood, under review). The current paper focuses on Takako's attitudes towards integrating grammar teaching with communicative work, a key component strongly emphasised in the 2009 Course of Study, and her beliefs about the social and contextual/resource-related factors that would facilitate and hinder implementation of this approach. Data were collected over a 16-month period and included: a (1) preliminary questionnaire; (2) a ten-week teacher journal study; (3) four classroom observations and post-observation interviews; and (4) a semi-structured interview. Overall, in spite of strong contextual pressures to focus on grammar and translation in preparation for university entrance examinations, Takako has adopted an innovative approach to integrating grammar teaching with communicative work. She expressed exceptionally positive attitudes towards the new curriculum's recommendations for integrating grammar teaching with communicative work. Notably, these attitudes were reflected to some extent in her practices, which demonstrated a highly efficient, student-centred approach to the teaching and testing of grammar. However, Takako's beliefs and practices also underscored a misalignment between the new curriculum's further emphasis on developing communicative ability and the preparation her students require for second-stage university entrance examinations, which largely emphasise reading skills.

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes learning language first and foremost for the purpose of communicating with others. It emphasizes student-centred learning and face-to-face speaking activities, though as Savignon (2007) notes students may also engage in reading and writing activities that involve "the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning" (p. 213). It is now generally accepted that students learning language for the purpose of communication benefit from explicit teaching in grammatical forms within the context of communicative activities. In light of this, a wide range of methodological options and activities for teaching grammar have been put forward. These can include, information-exchange activities, problem solving tasks and discussions, and what Nassaji and

Fotos (2011) describe as collaborative output tasks, for instance dictogloss, text-editing, reconstruction cloze, and jigsaw tasks. At various points during such activities, a focus on grammar can be incorporated to push students further along the interlanguage continuum (Ellis, 2002). In contrast to CLT, more traditional, structural transmission-based approaches (broadly referred to as *yakudoku* in Japan) tend to focus on the development of reading ability through teacher-led instruction, in which grammar is taught deductively, with translation from the target language to the first language predominating. Yet, despite the diversity that CLT embodies, as Littlewood (2007) observes, a pervasive misconception among EFL teachers is that “CLT means not teaching grammar and that CLT means teaching only speaking” (p. 246).

While senior high school teachers in Japan and many parts of the world have reported favourable attitudes towards CLT as a general approach (e.g., Huang, 2006; Nishino, 2012; Ozsevik, 2010) and to some extent the integration of grammar teaching with communicative work (i.e., Underwood, 2012a; Pahissa & Tragant, 2009), they also report actual implementation to be a formidable challenge due to various factors. Widely reported is the misalignment between national curriculums based on communicative approaches and the content of high-stakes examinations that typically emphasise grammar, vocabulary, and reading questions (Dahmardeh, 2009; Gorsuch, 2000; Huang, 2006; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013; Orafi & Borg, 2009; Ozsevik, 2010; Pahisa & Tragant, 2009; Nishino, 2012; Underwood, 2012a; 2012b). In addition, the global literature draws attention to challenges such as large class sizes (e.g., Waters & Vilches, 2008); low motivation for learning English (e.g., Humphries & Burns, 2015); low English proficiency (e.g., Sanchez & Borg, 2014); a poor understanding of CLT (Sakui, 2004), arising from inadequate teacher training (e.g., Cook, 2012; Orafi & Borg, 2009), a lack of textbooks and materials (e.g., Hasanova & Shadieva, 2008; Waters & Vilches, 2008), difficulties using government-mandated textbooks for CLT (e.g., Glasgow & Paller, 2014; Goh, Zhang, Ng, Hong, & Hua, 2005), and heavy administrative and extra-curricular duties (e.g., Underwood, 2012a; O'Donnell, 2005; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004).

Apart from a small number of studies in Japan (i.e., Underwood, 2012a; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013) and internationally (i.e., Pahissa & Tragant, 2009; Sanchez & Borg, 2014), research on high school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the integration of grammar teaching with communicative work, a specific dimension of CLT, remains scarce. In the current study, Takako's case brings to light a number of ways in which integration can be achieved, while highlighting the factors that hindered her fuller implementation of the

curriculum's communicative goals. The research questions guiding the larger multiple case study (Underwood, under review) were

1. In what ways have Japanese senior high school teachers of EFL been able to implement specific communicative components of the previous Course of Study that correspond with those of the new curriculum?
2. What attitudinal, social, and context-related factors would influence their integration of grammar teaching with communicative work under the new curriculum that now strongly emphasises this approach?
3. How might teacher beliefs about the various factors they report operate as an integrated system in facilitating or obstructing implementation of the new curriculum?

The data presented in the current paper focuses in on Takako's case, reporting in depth on her attitudes towards integrating grammar teaching with communicative work and her beliefs about the social and contextual/resource-related factors that would facilitate and hinder implementation of this approach. Where appropriate, reference to her teaching practices is made to corroborate this data.

Japan's Course of Study 2009 for Senior High School English

Japan's new national curriculum for senior high schools, the Course of Study 2009 for Foreign Languages: English (MEXT, 2009), was fully enacted at the senior high school level in April 2013. While the overall objectives for the new curriculum remain the same as the former 1999 curriculum, the previously separate *Reading*, *Writing*, and many *Oral Communication* objectives have been reorganised into integrated, four-skill courses. In addition, the new curriculum further emphasises English as the predominant medium of instruction and the development of critical thinking skills in English courses and other subjects across the curriculum. As with the previous Course of Study 1999 curriculum, the new curriculum expands the range of *Language Functions* and *Language-Use Situations* in which these are to be applied. In contrast to the previous curriculum, however, the Course of Study 2009 now clearly stipulates that the teaching of grammar within communicative work should guide the treatment of all content, and provides a stronger explication of the rationale for this approach throughout (see, for example, MEXT, 2009, pp. 42-44).

METHODS

Case Participant

The case of Takako, which is the focus of this paper, is drawn from a larger multiple case study of four Japanese senior high school English teachers (Grades 10 to 12), each working in schools where preparation for entrance to higher education is prioritised. Takako is a female teacher in her early forties and had been teaching for 23 years at the time of data collection. While I had initially considered her to be a senior teacher based on age and experience, she later informed me that she had only recently been transferred from a vocational senior high school to her current academic school she was not acknowledged by her new colleagues as being senior. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, and had been actively involved in independent, voluntary professional development outside of school. She teaches at an above average co-educational public school (based on the school's *hensachi*, a form of standardised rank score) in a rural location in the North West of Japan. Her school is not attached to a university. From April 2011, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) began in Takako's prefecture and an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT)¹ has been assigned to her school. At the time of data collection, Takako was a Grade 11 homeroom teacher, who was teaching *English II* (Grade 11) and (Grade 12) *Writing* courses under the Course of Study 1999 curriculum.

Takako's school is located in a north-westerly rural area of Japan, surrounded by paddy fields and other farmland. There was a light and pleasant atmosphere in the school, with many students eagerly greeting their teachers in the corridors and keen to start a conversation in English. Due to the streaming of classes, students often attend lessons in classrooms other than their homeroom. The classrooms accommodate approximately 42 students and are decorated with white paint and wooden floor boarding. Large windows stretch the length of either side of the classroom; fluorescent strips provide additional lighting. Students are seated in close proximity to each other in a seven-row by six-column formation and at individual, movable desks. At the front of the classrooms, separating the teacher from the front row of desks is a teacher's lectern, a raised teaching platform, and a blackboard that runs almost the entire length of the wall.

Takako bases her lessons around the MEXT textbooks for both of her courses, *English II* (*Voyager English Course II*; Daiichi Gakushusha, 2010) and *Writing* (*Element*:

¹ ALTs are native-English speakers who, as part of the MEXT's Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, come to Japan with the dual purpose of experiencing Japanese culture while sharing their culture through the teaching of English in junior and senior high schools.

English Writing; Keirinkan, 2010). However, in the *Writing* class that I observed, the lesson was based on a supplementary grammar textbook, *Uplift English Grammar* (Z-Kai, 2011). She also used a supplementary textbook for vocabulary (*System Eitango, Version 2*; Sundai Bunko, 2010). In the *English II* (four skills) classes I observed, Takako made extensive use of materials that she had created in collaboration with junior teachers. These were in the form of a substantial booklet based on the readings contained in the approved textbook, *Voyager English Course II*. The booklet included extended work on vocabulary, gap-fill exercises, textual enhancement of the English passages to facilitate comprehension (i.e., parsed with forward slash marks and written on separate lines), Japanese translations of the reading passages, additional outlining and summarising activities, supplementary reading comprehension questions, and a peer evaluation chart that was used during an oral summarising activity.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study adopted a sequential, mixed-methods design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), emphasising qualitative methods for generating data on teacher beliefs and integrating a quantitative method for investigating classroom practices (in contrast to most research in the Japanese context to date, cf. Taguchi, 2005). Informed consent was established with Takako and permission for research to be conducted at her school was granted by the school principal. Prior to the enactment of the new curriculum at the senior high school level, data were collected over a 16-month period (May 2011 to August 2012) in the following sequence: (1) a preliminary questionnaire; (2) a ten-week teacher journal study; (3) four classroom observations and post-observation interviews for each teacher; and (4) a semi-structured interview.

In terms of classroom observations, the study adopted a predominantly structured, deductive approach (Cohen et al., 2011), adapting the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching scheme (COLT; Allen, Fröhlich, & Spada, 1984) to correspond with the communicative components of the previous and forthcoming national curriculum. Many of the previous curriculum's communicative components were reemphasised in the new Course of Study 2009, and so, where teachers did not address in some way the previous recommendations for integrating grammar teaching and the four skills with language-use situations, such practices could indicate they would be unlikely to implement this central component of the forthcoming curriculum. Further, as with *English II*, the objectives for both the *Reading* and *Writing* courses specified a clear emphasis on the integration of grammar

teaching with language skills and communication in concrete, language-use situations. Takako was observed four times during one semester (45 to 55 minutes for each class): three times for the main four-skill *English II* course and once for the *Writing* course.

For each of the qualitative methods (i.e., the preliminary questionnaire, journals, and semi-structured interview), analysis was mainly deductive, categorisation being largely predetermined by the belief domains of the theoretical framework (the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Ajzen, 2005). The analysis of classroom observation data was predominantly quantitative and comprised of two main stages: (1) the kind of activities and episodes observed under the adapted COLT scheme (based on field notes) and the duration of these (minutes and seconds; based on post hoc video and audio analysis); and (2) other emergent themes (e.g., episodes of students sleeping and responses to pair work; based on field notes and post hoc video analysis).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Takako's Case

As Table 1 shows, Takako had mostly positive attitudes towards integrating grammar teaching with communicative work and minimal motivation to comply with social pressure against it. She had adopted practices that were in many respects aligned with the previous (and forthcoming) curriculum's communicative approach.

In terms of Takako's teaching practices, while the content of her classes was based on reading passages, unlike other teachers in the larger study, when translation work did occur in class, most of this was from Japanese to English and took place during integrated-skills activities (Table 1, 93% across four lessons), many of which were student-centred (57%) and emphasised speaking. As Table 1 indicates, a high degree of English use was evident by both Takako (72% across four lessons) and her students (74%). Moreover, she meaningfully integrated grammar teaching with language functions (i.e., paraphrasing, summarising, and praising) during an interactive oral summarising activity. What was lacking in Takako's classes, however, was the integration of grammar teaching with a wider range of language functions (e.g., agreeing/disagreeing and advising) and in a variety of language-use situations (e.g., talking on the phone and activities in the workplace), especially those focused on speaking, as the previous curriculum mentioned and new curriculum strongly emphasizes. Takako indicated that she wanted "to move beyond this teaching" but had not yet arrived at any solutions (Post-observation Interview 3).

TABLE 1
A Summary of Takako's Beliefs and Teaching Practices

Beliefs¹ about the New Curriculum	
Overall attitude towards integrating grammar teaching with communicative work	Mostly positive attitudes. Believes the curriculum is misaligned with exam content, but it can facilitate grammatical development
Overall motivation to comply with social pressure against the approach	Low. Perseveres with her approach in spite of pressure from students and colleagues to adopt a structural, transmission-based approach
Overall sense of control over the skills, resources, or circumstances necessary to implement the approach	Little control over collaboration among teachers within the English department and across the school curriculum. Strong sense of control over the necessary teaching skills to implement the curriculum and a creative use of time to facilitate implementation
Teaching Practices: COLT Analysis	
1. A Focus on Language functions/-Use Situations	low (24%)
2. Skills integration	high (93%)
3. Student-centred work	moderate (57%)
4. Student use of English	high (74%)
5. Teacher use of English	high (72%)
Overall implementation of communicative objectives	Moderate (64)

Note. (%) = overall percentage of time (as a mean) across four observations; low = mean of four lessons in the range of 6-32%; moderate = mean in the range of 33-66%; high = mean in the range of 67-100%; *Overall Implementation* = the mean of the adapted COLT analysis categories (1-5)

¹Theory of Planned Behaviour belief domains (i.e., behavioural, normative, and control)

Takako's Attitude towards the efficacy of the approach

A key finding that has not been emphasised in the literature to date emerged from Takako's qualitative journal data, in which she stressed that integrating grammar teaching with communicative work is beneficial to the development of grammatical knowledge necessary for entrance examinations. As she commented,

We all have to stop the teacher-centred way of lessons... We have to overhaul this whole notion of English grammar education; we have to shift from "knowledge" to actual "use"... instruction time should be kept to a minimum and be simple. It does not have to be attempted in English and students can read and study the textbook themselves... In this way, we can save a lot of time for actual communication activities (Takako, Journal 10, Lines 867-877)

In the semi-structured interview, when asked whether integrating grammar with communicative work would be more effective in teaching grammar than a structural transmission-based approach, Takako drew attention to how the new approach would specifically benefit lower level students, stating “... if they have time [in class] to output what they learn,... you know, talk to each other, think together with their friends. It’s a kind of memorable experience, that’s why they learn, they accumulate language” (Lines 112-117).

Takako’s beliefs were reflected to a certain extent in her classroom practices, in which she provided opportunities for students to work out not only grammatical rules but also pragmatic functions. The following five-minute extract from Takako’s class illustrates her interactive and student-centred approach in explaining the grammatical and lexical features of the sentence, *The other day, my English teacher told me that my ability to speak English has much improved.* 私の英語の先生は先日、私のしゃべる能力がとても伸びたと言ってくれました。

1. Takako guides students through translation from English to Japanese, deconstructing the sentence.
2. Using gestures and explaining in Japanese, she draws attention to potentially redundant grammatical features (i.e., the *to* in ‘*ability to speak English*’).
3. She allows some form-focused oral practice, allowing the students to listen to and repeat the sentence in English.
4. She elicits the meaning of the lexical item, *nobiru*, meaning to *improve*.
5. She allows the students to discuss in Japanese the pragmatic function of *shite kureta*, a verb conjugation used to express gratitude for something somebody did or said, and share their ideas.
6. She elicits variations of *told me* (i.e., *said to me*), and, with reference to metalinguistic terms, she explains the use of the conjunction *that* + *SVO(C)* (subject, verb, and object/complement).
7. Students orally construct the full sentence in pairs, encouraging deeper cognitive processing of the language.
8. In reaction to student errors, using both Japanese (L1) and English (L2) the teacher orally provides an incidental focus on form for the present perfect verb tense *has improved*, drawing attention to language use with a functional (rather than structural) description of the grammatical structure.
9. After a quick choral drill, she has students once again orally construct the sentence with one partner, then with another for confirmation and further consolidation.
10. Finally, students write out the sentence in English, exchanging their paper for peer checking against the answer sheet before handing it in, with the aim of encouraging further engagement/ learning, providing immediate feedback, and saving her time grading each one closely.

Social influences on Takako’s Teaching Practices

Colleagues. Takako’s positive attitudes towards the efficacy of integrating grammar with student-centred communicative work corresponded with her overall low motivation to comply with social pressure against this component. Takako perceives many of her colleagues as being strongly against the new curriculum. Throughout her journals, she described a working environment where engagement in professional development and

attendance at teaching conferences is considered “stupid” (Journal 7, Lines 778-779), with those attending regarded as “enthusiasts who don’t fit in” (Journal 3, Line 222-223). In her journal, she also described how after an observation of her *English II* (four skills) class, colleagues expressed strong disapproval of her speaking too much English during class:

... there were many criticisms from other teachers that “this kind of lesson is pointless” and “The most important thing in university entrance exams is the ability to translate difficult sentences, and if any more time is wasted on these lessons the students will end up failing the second-stage exam.” (Journal 1, Lines 95-98)

In her semi-structured interview, Takako explained that many teachers believe the purpose of English is to increase the number of students gaining acceptance to high level universities. She reported her colleagues as frequently stressing, “we should care about the standardised rank score [*hensachi*]... Classroom teaching doesn’t matter” (Lines 292-294).

Students. In her journal Takako stated, “What I always think is, if only I could teach the same students for the whole three years, there would be a lot more teaching possibilities. Any kind of teaching style would be possible” (Journal 9, Lines 815-817). In supporting these beliefs, Takako referred to the findings of two student surveys that she had administered regarding grammar teaching and her approach. She reported that most students “felt less pressure and more motivated to study English” by studying in groups or pairs (Journal 7, Appended Documents, Lines 652-653). She also reported most of the students as considering oral and written activities as “very satisfying” and “very effective in learning English” (Journal 7, Appended Documents, Lines 635-645). In first journal, she referred to the results of a survey of students in her Grade 11 class, many of whom she had taught the previous year. Overall, she found the majority of the class continued to support her teaching approach, reporting “In my *English II* class, I use quite a lot of English and the students seem livelier...almost all the students found those lessons enjoyable” (Journal 1, Lines 93-95).

In contrast, she believes that while Grade 10 students in their first year of senior high school may support the new curriculum, Grade 11 students might not if they had learned English through a structural transmission-based approach in the previous year. She reported that one Grade 11 class, which comprised of many students who she had not taught previously, at first expressed strong resistance when required to use the grammar they had learned during speaking and writing activities. She stated, “Half of

the students just didn't know what to make of my lessons...students complained that what I was doing was something they are not used to....They even showed hostility towards my lesson" (Journal 9, Lines 807-812).

Yet, despite feeling considerable isolation from her colleagues as well as initially experiencing "hostility" from some students when requiring them to use grammar in speaking and writing activities (Journal 9, Line 812), Takako had persevered with her approach and later reported her students having achieved the highest scores in their grade level on mock entrance examinations for prestigious universities. In the semi-structured interview, Takako explained how this achievement alleviated a substantial degree of pressure from both colleagues and students to adopt a structural, transmission-based approach. This finding is particularly important because it highlights one way in which proving the efficacy of the new curriculum's communicative approach to hard-to-convince colleagues, students, and others could be achieved through actual improvements in standardised test scores.

Influential Context-Related Factors

A Lack of Time. In schools where institutional goals focus on entrance to higher education, it was unsurprising that many of Takako's duties were associated in some way with preparation for entrance examinations. As with much of the research in Japan and internationally, Takako's beliefs confirmed that a lack of time for lesson preparation would be problematic in terms of her implementation of the new curriculum, and she emphasised this factor throughout her data. For instance, in her journal she stated, "We go to lessons in between the administrative work. There is no time for lesson planning" (Journal 4, Lines 290-296). Takako explained that in order to create time for planning her current lessons she has to make significant efforts:

I just have to manage. In my case, preparing and marking are done in between club activities on Saturdays and Sundays. I intentionally commute by train rather than by a car just so that I can work. On weekdays, when I can only work until six because I have family responsibilities, I take the work with me and work at home. To not make myself physically worn out I take vitamin supplements regularly.
(Journal 1, Lines 78-82)

In addition to the lack of time for planning, Takako stressed that while she has received much professional development in the past and is fairly confident in her teaching skills (Semi-Structured Interview, Lines 250-253), there is now insufficient time to attend the training she may need to implement the new Course of Study 2009. In her journal, for instance, she stated,

We are too busy with administrative work, which seems to be increasing in amount every year...even though I am willing to spend money to travel far to learn something, it might have an adverse effect in terms of relationships with other teachers, and it might lead to negligence of other duties which I have to make up for afterwards. In the past, there were days for seminars and it was easier to attend. However, in recent years, school has become very busy, and it is very difficult to for me to leave. (Takako, Journal 2, Lines 148-158)

Throughout her journals, Takako referred to a number of specific duties and responsibilities that could hinder her implementation of the new curriculum. These included, for example, committee work, careers advice, an increasing number of school events, coordinating with ALTs, PTA meetings, and club activities, which she described as “just overwhelming” (Journal 1, Lines 31-32). She drew attention to the significant burden placed on her as both an English teacher and homeroom teacher. First, Takako considers the amount of lesson preparation and test and assignment marking involved in English teaching to be “just not comparable to other subjects” (Journal 1, Lines 61-62). Moreover, she described the additional workload of being a homeroom teacher as “huge”, stating she is “in charge of everything: career guidance, general counselling, grading, accounting, newsletters, publishing; the list just goes on” (Journal 1, Lines 45-48). Takako also explained that in her school due to the centrality of English in university entrance examinations and the additional guidance required, unlike other subject teachers, English teachers are often expected to be homeroom teachers for two or more years consecutively. Takako also pointed out that coordinating with ALTs creates a significant additional workload for English teachers, stating “It is not an exaggeration when it is said that the JET program is nothing more than extra baggage for Japanese teachers of English...the burden it creates is huge” (Journal 7, Lines 523-527).

Yet, while Takako expressed having little time recently for formal training, she reported having read widely on grammar teaching and CLT and considering how she could

apply this knowledge to her examination-oriented context. The benefits of this informal learning and reflection were evident in her positive attitude towards the approach and her sense of control over the teaching abilities that she believes are necessary to implement it. Central to Takako's approach was the presentation of grammatical explanations and translations in home-study booklets, which she creates in collaboration with junior teachers. She explained how this approach reinforces learning, provides immediate feedback, and significantly reduces her marking; thereby, freeing up substantial time for lesson planning, making materials, and other administrative work.

(1) Over the past several years, / people have _____ / _____ _____ / () restaurants, () trains, and even () the theater. //	(1) ここ数年, 人々は慣れっことになりつつある 他人の声を聞くことに 携帯電話で話しているのを レストランや列車, あるいは劇場内において でさえ
(2) That _____ //	(2) それはどうやら避けられないことになってしまっ たようだ
(3) Today, () () () people are trying /	(3) 今日, ますます多くの人がしようとしている

Figure 1. An extract representing approximately 20% of the cloze sections used during the activity

Furthermore, classroom observations indicated that when there was translation work in class rather than the teacher-led English to Japanese translation widespread in many schools, most occurred in pair and group activities that comprised of Japanese to English translations, requiring students to reconstruct cloze sections of the passage orally, one to three sentences at a time; thereby demanding an element of fluency (Figure 1). The difficulty of cloze sections ranged from one or two content and function words to conjugating verbs into the appropriate tense as part of a more extended cloze.

In a meaning-focused oral activity, Takako successfully integrated grammar teaching with paraphrasing and summarising language functions, in which students drew on grammar, vocabulary, and mind maps (Figure 2) from home-study booklets to retell a reading passage orally.

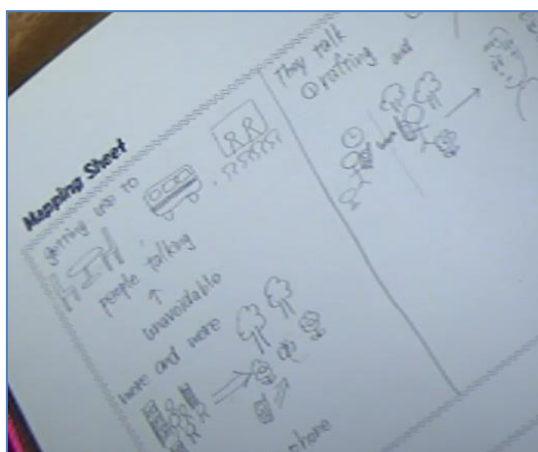


Figure 2. A mind map created by a student to assist in retelling the passage

At this time, partners made use of language functions (i.e., asking for repetition and clarification, and praising) as well as metalinguistic devices for showing attention and indicating comprehension (i.e., nodding, smiling, and making eye contact) and offered feedback to the speaker. Issues with student passivity that have been noted in some studies (e.g., Kurihara, 2008; Rahman & Karim, 2015) were not apparent in Takako's classes. As noted earlier, Table 1 indicates that 74% of Takako's overall classes consisted of student opportunities for speaking in English, with minimal time spent on teacher-fronted, grammar explanations. Takako's case extends Li and Edwards' (2013) recent findings in China by showing that while preparation for entrance examinations does indeed constrain CLT implementation in senior high schools, many aspects of a communicative approach can still be achieved. Thus, an important aspect of Takako's case highlights the value of context-specific, informal training and collaboration.

Issues with Collaboration. A final context-related factor concerns broader issues with collaboration within English courses and across the curriculum. Takako's case drew attention to issues with the teaching-partner system, in which teachers are often expected to keep strict pace with each other's coverage of the textbook. Extending the findings of recent research in Japan, Takako revealed that in addition to facilitating common mid-term and final tests (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013), in her school the main underlying reason for such practice was to ensure that courses are completed "as quickly as possible to begin study for university entrance examinations" earlier than Grade 12 (Takako, Semi-structured Interview, Line 323). She believes this practice further reinforces a structural, transmission-based approach.

Further issues concerning collaboration across the school curriculum were evident. Takako believed that insufficient critical thinking skills, such as analysis and evaluation, would be an obstacle to her implementation of new curriculum, stating

...as for English class we are expected to teach them how to communicate, how to show their emotion, their feelings, but in other class[es], I mean math, science, Japanese, social studies, basically students are very passive, they don't have the chance to criticize something, discuss or debate. Even in Japanese, they feel difficulty in speaking out, even in Japanese. They don't like to think creatively, so much less [in] English. We should change our education drastically. (Lines 513-518)

Takako stated that by developing critical thinking abilities in other subject's (e.g., through activities that require the synthesis and evaluation of information and ideas) her students might then be encouraged to participate more enthusiastically in English language activities, especially those that require critical thinking such as discussion and debate (Semi-Structured Interview, Lines 524-526).

On a final, and related, point, Takako reported that for teachers to implement such an approach, a school-wide system for assessing communicative components was required. In her journal she wrote,

... from junior high schools onwards...students are reluctant and even completely refuse to voluntarily express their opinions in the class. It is partly normal, because as kids grow, they become more conscious of how they are perceived by others. However, I think the biggest factor lies elsewhere, that is, knowing that their opinions are not going to affect their grades. (Journal 9, Lines 924-928)

Takako underscored the importance of assessment being directly connected to lessons, stating "Currently the grades are based only on the result of the regular [mid-term and final] exams...If we were to change the way of the lessons to more interactive ones, we have to find ways to evaluate the communication aspect" (Journal 9, Lines 916-922). According to Takako, "Before the start of the new curriculum, it is important to first build a foundation in which the students feel that their voluntary expression and active interaction in class will affect their final evaluation" (Journal 9, Lines 967-969).

Takako expressed some degree of optimism in her ability to begin assessing students under the new curriculum. In her interview she stated:

... it's very difficult, but for me, you know, it's impossible to do everything perfect. For me, if students speak vividly, enjoyably, that's the first step, and then we can ask more. We should think about the logic, your opinion first, support sentence, and the conclusion, like this we can ask more, but first let them take the first step, but we also need consensus among teachers. (Lines 460-463)

However, Takako stressed the difficulties that would arise from a new approach to assessment, stating it could be “very difficult considering the busy schedule of the teachers and the amount of work in and out the classroom, and also when considering the cooperation among teachers and their competency” (Journal 9, Lines 958-961). Nonetheless, Takako believes that establishing a collaborative teaching environment is a requisite for implementation of the new curriculum to succeed, stating

Even if I start taking in a new idea, doing it alone won't ensure continuation... [it] will just end as a one-off performance. A new teaching idea cannot be attempted alone; the whole year have to do it together to ensure continuity of the new program. (Journal 9, Lines 781-784)

Summary of Takako's Case

Overall, Takako expressed exceptionally positive attitudes towards the new curriculum's recommendations for integrating grammar teaching with communicative work. These attitudes were reflected in her classroom practices, which demonstrated a highly efficient, student-centred approach to the teaching and testing of grammar. These practices were also in spite of the pressure she had experienced from colleagues and the initial expectations of some Grade 11 students to adopt a structural transmission-based approach. Furthermore, Takako's classes were aligned with many components of the previous and new Course of Study (e.g., integration of the four skills and providing opportunities for students to speak in English), as Table 1 indicates. Her reflective practice and context-relevant professional development were clearly evident in facilitating her teaching of grammar in the context of communicative work.

However, Takako's beliefs also underscored the misalignment between the new curriculum's further emphasis on developing speaking skills and the preparation required for second-stage university entrance examinations, which largely emphasise reading. For Takako,

to spend class time integrating grammar teaching into language-use situations, where oral communication is the primary goal, would be incompatible with this belief and counter to the goals of the majority of her students. This was corroborated by her teaching practices, which indicated that opportunities for students to speak English mainly occurred during activities that focused on forms and where reading was the primary goal. Considering, also, that she believes the successful implementation of a communicative approach would require cooperation between teachers at each grade level and across the curriculum, and perceived herself as having little control over this factor, her implementation of the more communicative aspects of the curriculum would seem problematic.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

While the case study reported in this paper cannot claim to generalize its findings in a statistical sense, several important implications can be drawn. The first concerns university entrance examinations. Takako's case clearly suggests that success on the current examinations can still be achieved while implementing many aspects of the communicative national curriculum. However, in spite of her successes, Takako's case also illustrates how the integration of grammar teaching with more communicative components of the curriculum was limited for the most part by the absence of an oral section on entrance examinations. It is clear, therefore, that in senior high schools where preparation for entrance examinations is central to institutional goals, the inclusion of an oral component would provide teachers with much needed justification for teaching oral communication in their classes. Yet, the findings from this study also indicate that even if more examinations were to include communicative components, other factors operating within school contexts would still need addressing.

One key factor is teacher education. Without the establishment of an appropriate and effective system of teacher development, the difficulties teachers face in integrating grammar teaching with communicative work would continue to be a serious impediment to curriculum implementation. Because the current examinations are likely to emphasise reading, one aspect of teacher development should ensure that teachers actively consider the kind of reading tasks that are required; not only the broader content of examinations but also the constructs and skills that are tested, and as Takako demonstrated, how effective preparation may be achieved through a variety of teaching approaches. In turn, information of this sort

has the potential to moderate the influence of local cultures of learning that emphasise structural, transmission-based teaching; thereby helping to facilitate the introduction of new approaches that are more aligned with communicative goals (Underwood, 2012a).

Also evident from this study is that to establish such an approach to teacher development, a substantial degree of cooperation and collaboration would need to occur among English teachers, English teachers and content subject teachers, and with school management. In Takako's case, extra-curricular duties appear to be especially onerous for English teachers, who reported a significantly higher workload due to the centrality of English in the entrance examinations. Thus, a critical level of cooperation would first need to occur between teachers, department leaders, and school management in order to negotiate the allocation of time necessary to establish and participate in specific, school-based professional development, consider effective configurations for Japanese teacher and ALTs, and to devise a system for assessing communicative components of the English curriculum. However, because preparing students to pass examinations that emphasise vocabulary, grammar, and reading passages is currently the main priority for many schools, it is unlikely that time resources will be diverted. This further reinforces the need for communicative components on entrance examinations, which would allow schools to direct more of their teachers' time towards preparation in these areas.

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Japanese teacher and assistant teacher accounts of primary-secondary links in English education

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Abstract

The paper discusses part of a 2013 nationwide survey¹ ($N = 2873$) in Japan of primary 5th and 6th grade homeroom teachers, their assistants, junior high English teachers, and their assistants on the subject of whether and how best to link foreign language education between school levels. Analyses of the four data sets suggest that promoting more links and integrating school curricula are comparatively less desired by homeroom teachers. While they have had generally positive experiences of all forms of links, discussions with junior high teachers about curricula and goals appear to be less helpful than those about teaching methodology and materials. Busy educators at both levels worry about what should be and is being taught at primary school, and have been learning from each other through inter-school linking activities. However, consultations with assistants in the context of links appear to be helping the primary homeroom teachers most on a day to day basis.

Japanese teacher and assistant teacher accounts of primary-secondary links in English education

Many countries seeking to improve their peoples' intercultural communication skills consider promoting links in foreign languages as crucial in maintaining motivation and achieving goals (e.g., Edelenbos, Johnstone, & Kubanek, 2006; Evans, 2007; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Nishiko, 2011). Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) lowered the start point for foreign languages in April 2011, mandating 35 "Foreign Language Activity" (FLA) classes per year for children aged 11 and 12 in grades 5 and 6, the final years at the primary level of schooling. While junior high schools have always had professional teachers for the main foreign language, i.e., English, over 90% of primary teachers are not qualified to teach it

(Mahoney & Inoi, 2014). Research by Benesse (2010) shows that they have the least confidence in teaching these classes, and that many rely on native and non-native speaking assistants to lead them (pp. 38-39).

In response to these problems, and with an eye towards making FLA a core, evaluated subject by 2020, the government and local boards of education have been promoting exchanges between primary homeroom teachers (HRTs) and junior high school teachers of English (JTEs), in addition to teacher-training programmes. According to MEXT surveys conducted before the official introduction of FLA, the proportion of school zones reporting some kind of inter-school link had risen rapidly from under 49% in 2008 (MEXT, 2009, p. 8) to over 72% (MEXT, 2011, p. 7) in just three years. However, in more recent years, reports based on over 1,600 schools by Eiken (2015) show that such proportions fell to about 62% in 2013, and even further to just over 46% in 2014 (p. 168). Issues raised in this paper may help explain the apparent decline in school link rates.

Beyond early studies (e.g., Matsukawa & Ohshita, 2007; Yamaguchi & Tatsumi, 2010), large-scale research has not compared to what extent teachers believe various link types have been found helpful. Additionally, no researcher has asked for the opinions of assistant English teachers (ALTs) on such activities, despite the fact that over 65% of ALTs teach at both school levels (Mahoney & Inoi, 2014). Further, researchers have yet to compare teachers' views on what new types of links they would like to see. The data to be discussed in this paper² will shed light on each of these issues.

After looking at whether teachers at both school levels want more inter-school links, the main research questions to be discussed are 1) Which types of links do teachers believe are most effective? and 2) What other kind of links do teachers want? The paper concludes with ideas on how far inter-school links should be pursued in consideration of all teacher groups in the survey.

Method

In 2013, the author conducted a nationwide survey in Japan to gauge teachers' responses to and opinions about FLA classes, nearly two years after their official introduction. Questionnaires consisted of both multiple choice and open-ended questions; they were written in Japanese for fifth and sixth grade HRTs and JTEs, and in English for the groups of ALTs at the two school levels. Responses were accepted over a three-month timeframe. The HRT version, the focus of the project, consisted of 28 questions in total, seven of which were open-ended. The other three versions ranged from 20 to 27 questions. The response rates for each of the teacher groups were: 45% and 19% for primary HRTs ($n = 1802$) and primary ALTs ($n = 387$) respectively, with a 26% response rate for junior high JTEs ($n = 515$) and 17% for junior high ALTs ($n = 169$).³ A total of 2,873 teachers responded.

Participants and Procedure

A pilot survey consisting of four questionnaire types was conducted in late 2012, and involved 81 teachers and assistant teachers. In all, thirty-seven primary HRTs, 22 junior high JTEs, 14 primary ALTs, and eight junior high ALTs responded. After reviews of the pilot data, follow-up interviews with four to ten respondents from each group, and questionnaire revisions, survey packages for each of the four groups were posted to 2000 primary and 1000 junior high schools throughout the nation. The main group were HRTs teaching grades 5 and 6 at public schools, and schools at both levels were selected from national listings in the *Zenkoku Gakkou Souran 2012* (Kyoiku Solution Cooperation, 2011). Responses were elicited between January and March 2013 via packages containing self-addressed envelopes of two types at primary schools: one envelope with two copies of Japanese-language questionnaires for HRTs, and another with one questionnaire in English for ALTs, since primary assistants are not necessarily based at one school and may wish to post from home. A similar procedure was used for the junior high school survey.

To ensure representation from each of Japan's 47 prefectures despite great population differences, the author pre-selected five public schools of a range of sizes

from each prefecture (a total of 235 schools), and let six research assistants choose the remainder at will. In order to allow prefectures with larger populations (and more pages of school addresses) greater representation, the assistants were instructed to select a specified, equal number of public schools from each page of *Souran* lists. No patterns were observed in the six assistants' choices, though no attempt was made to prove their randomness.

Questionnaire items were created after extensive consultation with all four groups of teachers in Japan. Associates in Korea, Italy, the UK and the USA also contributed valuable comments on survey design. Question wording was set after reviews of similar surveys, including MEXT (2011) in addition to those of Benesse, 2010; Inoi, Yoshida, Mahoney, & Itagaki, 2001; Matsukawa & Ohshita, 2007; and Yamaguchi & Tatsumi, 2010. The Appendices display only the questions discussed in this paper from each questionnaire; however all four full-length questionnaires can be found in the final MEXT project report, available at www.ipc.fukushima-u.ac.jp/~a085/. Multiple choice data were analysed with SPSS 16.0, and open-ended data categories were determined through multiple iterations of data via IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys 4.0.1.

Results and Discussion

Gaps in Perceived Need for More Links

To begin at the end of the survey: the last, open-ended question asked primary homeroom teachers how to improve FLA (Appendix A, HRT Q28). The notions of linking schools and unifying curricula were mentioned only six times each amongst the 1415 handwritten answers received. The creation, or furthering, of links does not appear to be a priority for most HRTs, for whom FLA remains a new and imposed subject. The following quotation assumes a near future situation in which FLA becomes a core subject, and provides a concise introduction to the topic from an HRT perspective:

There are prefectures, cities, and specially designated educational zones that have [already] made foreign language classes core for grades 1 to 6. However, some

asymmetry (a problem) has developed. It's hard to imagine primary and secondary school links with other core subjects, too. Foreign languages are important, and other core subjects are also important. It's strange to give foreign language priority over all the others in making these links. (This doesn't mean I'm against the idea of links, however).
(translated by author, here and throughout paper)

Of the four groups of teachers surveyed, HRTs in question 13 (Appendix A) indicated the least positive disposition towards more links in regard to FLA (Table 1).

Table 1. Need for more links as perceived by the four teacher groups (%)
(*N* = 2873)

Primary school	Yes	No	Don't know	Total (n)
HRT	38	17	45	1751
ALT	69	7	25	355
Junior high				
JTE	62	11	27	510
ALT	68	5	28	166

Note. Tabulated from HRT Q13, primary ALT Q20, JTE Q11, and junior high ALT Q11 (see Appendices).

HRTs' lukewarm stance towards furthering links from this data echoes that of smaller, earlier studies, including one by Yamaguchi and Tatsumi (2010) in which HRTs saw links as less important than their junior high counterparts (p. 204). Yet the large percentage of HRTs who indicate that they "Don't know" if they need more links does not necessarily represent an unwillingness to create them: it may indicate only a desire for more explanation as to the process, content, and possible results of such links to determine whether the extra work would be justified. As one HRT pointedly summarises, "Any time spent on further discussions or learning may be seen as an improvement on the present [FLA] situation, but it would often be taken from time for other things. We're just that busy." In fact, a 2014 MEXT survey shows that primary and junior high teachers already spend over 11.5 and 12 hours a day at their respective schools, with nearly two more hours per day doing schoolwork at home (Japan Times, 2015).

One may add that links between FLA and junior high English classes are already being pursued in most school zones, and that most teachers have already participated in some form of them. In an open-ended follow-up to HRT question 13, teachers in favour of more links were asked to describe what would be needed, while those who disagreed were asked for their reasons why (Appendix A, Q14). An HRT from the latter group noted, “we’re already doing enough linking. Our objectives differ, and the information we have at present will suffice. We should use the time instead for developing teaching materials.” Another HRT cited more pressing concerns with FLA: “we need English teachers here more than links with junior highs.” Such responses summarise reasons why some HRTs hesitate or are reluctant to forge new links with junior highs.

Regarding the higher rate of support from junior high teachers, it is easy to see that those on the receiving end of FLA would be affected by any improvements that further links could bring, and would thus be in favour of taking more action (cf. Yamaguchi & Tatsumi, 2010). In all, 62% of junior high teachers indicated they would like more links; yet some expressed frustration with what has already been done. For example, according to results on JTE question 14 (Appendix B), over 38% of English teachers have visited primary schools to demonstrate classes, a frequent type of linking activity; but one such JTE remarked that, although the introduction of FLA at primary schools is appreciated, “as it stands now, the majority of inter-school link work has been left up to the JTEs and I really don’t want to do it” (JTE Q20, Appendix B). Interestingly, the only form of link this respondent had experienced was “Other,” described as a kind of team teaching (*goudoujugyou*). Unfortunately, it appears that a bad experience had put the respondent off the idea of forging new links as well, leading to a negative answer to JTE Q11. Despite the extra work that accompanies these events, the data show that an overall majority of JTEs want more to be done to connect FLA with their English classes.

Based on the ratios of respondents to primary ALT question 17 (Appendix C) and junior high ALT question 14 (Appendix C), which asked for input only from those who teach at both primary and junior highs, one can deduce that about 66% of all ALTs teach at both levels. Perhaps this is why the highest ratio of support for more links comes from ALT groups at both school levels, each at just under 70% in Table 1. One

may argue either on a positive note that this rate reflects their commitment to improving English education, or on a negative one that, for various reasons (such as language barriers, short histories at schools, irregular visit schedules), some ALTs simply do not perceive the steps that have already taken place at their local schools. The next sections provide details on the kinds of links all four teacher groups have experienced, and on what they would like to see.

Effectiveness of Particular Link Types

HRTs

Beginning with the core group of 1802 primary HRTs, consulting ALTs about classes was both the most frequently indicated and most helpful form of link. Although some may not consider this activity a link type (or at least not a formal one), one may easily consider it as a form of *jouhou koukan*, or “exchange of information,” a general term used in MEXT reports (e.g., MEXT, 2011) to describe linking activities between teachers. Since late 2012, the notion of exchanging information with ALTs has also been employed in a large-scale Eiken study (2013) as well, in which it was the second most frequently mentioned link after “model classes” (p. 31). Further, teachers in that survey chose a very similar notion of “time for meeting and liaising with ALTs” from a list of what they would most like to have at training (*kenshuu*) sessions (p. 29). Unfortunately, time constraints on communicating with ALTs stifle welcomed opportunities to discuss a range of pressing issues. Table 2 has been arranged with most helpful (though not necessarily most frequently mentioned) link types at the top.

Table 2. Ranking of link type according to HRT perceptions of helpfulness* ($n = 1802$)

Rank	Primary-Secondary link type	Helpful (%)	Total (n)
1	Consult primary ALT/EAA**	98	1120
2	Other	92	87
3	Discuss teaching methodology/teaching material with JTE	81	488
4	Class observation at junior high	76	788
5	Consult junior high ALT	76	261
6	Discuss goals with JTE	71	260
7	Discuss curriculum with JTE	67	296

*Note. Table based on data from HRT Q12 (Appendix A), with multiple responses accepted. **English Activity Assistants (EAAs) are often but not always non-native English speakers, recruited locally to share their experiences of English language and foreign cultures in FLA classes.

First, one may cite an example of the most frequently experienced link type in Table 2. A teacher of grade 6 with “beginner” level English and no experience of any kind of links except that of consulting an ALT, with whom s/he teaches 90% of classes, writes “My current ALT knows the curriculum content at our junior high, so we teach based on that.” As in Matsukawa and Ohshita (2007, p. 42) this awareness of the junior high curriculum content appears very important to HRTs, and may perhaps be sufficient on its own to assuage their apprehension.

As for “Other” link types in Table 2, which were experienced least often ($n = 87$) and yet found second most helpful overall, 23 teachers responded with *kenshuu* or on-the-job training. These appear to have been organised by localities, although ALT dispatch agencies had offered some, and were often attended with JTEs and/or ALTs. The next largest group of “other” linking events were “*demae jugyo*,” or classes delivered by visiting teachers, listed by 14 respondents (also specifically requested in Table 3). Taken together, this could indicate a rift amongst HRTs over whether these new classes would best be given by others or by themselves; yet the former may be

required only temporarily, and then phased out after HRTs acquire ability in FLA teaching through observation, training, and practice. The remaining “other” ideas included class observations by JTEs at HRTs’ or other primary schools, and team-teaching experiences with JTEs and/or ALTs.

The comparative ineffectiveness of discussing curricula with JTEs warrants comment. Benesse reported that by 2010 as many as 9.4% of surveyed primaries had already had a curriculum created from links with junior highs (2010, p. 53). Yet an open-ended question in this survey (HRT Q28, Appendix A), dealing with how FLA might be improved, revealed that only six of 1415 HRT comments advocate a primary through secondary, 9-year English curriculum. In other curriculum-related suggestions received, of which there were only 38, homeroom teachers simply ask for a more defined *primary* FLA curriculum, without mentioning the integration of curricula.

Question 14 regarded what new links HRTs feel are needed most. There were 780 responses to the question. As many as 206 comments (Table 3) revealed a need to know what junior high teachers expect of FLA; yet only 10 among them went as far as recommending a systematic integration of curricula as the answer (in comment category 5). And in HRT Q15a (Appendix A), a slim majority of respondents (56.1%) felt a necessity of creating an integrated curriculum when asked directly. However, in a follow-up question on whether such a task is actually possible in their locality (15b, Appendix A), only 21.7% agreed. Perhaps HRTs feel that although closer curriculum coordination with junior highs could improve English education in the long term, it may not contribute significantly to improving their own FLA classes. One HRT writes in question 14 that if more links were to occur, “JTEs would ask [HRTs] to teach beyond the range of the current guidelines (like how to write the months and days).”

Table 3. Top HRT descriptions of links still required (n = 780 responses)

Rank	Comment Category	Freq.	Other keywords within category (<i>n</i>)
1	Clearer definition of “how much”	206	To what degree (43); English proficiency (10)
2	Lesson contents	193	What should pupils know (38); Class subject matter (17); Writing (8); Alphabet (3); <i>Romaji</i> (3)
3	Teaching	158	Teaching methods (47); Concrete (17)
4	Class forms	118	Observation (13); Progression (10); Class atmosphere (10); <i>Demae jugyou</i> (9)
5	Curriculum	50	Goals (32); Systematic (10)

Note. Table created from HRT Q14 data (Appendix A), using IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys 4.0.1. Due to the nature of open-ended comments, some comment overlapping remains despite numerous iterations.

On the other hand, one must note that 84% of HRTs do not appear even to have had an opportunity to discuss curriculum issues with their JTEs, and 87% haven’t done so regarding goals⁴ (Table 2). Since such inter-school level experiences were generally reported to have been helpful, the data certainly do not suggest that these kinds of focussed linking activities are not worth doing. In fact, 112 of the 195 teachers who have found discussions of curricula “helpful” responded in favour of still more links. Finally, the top two descriptions of ideal links amongst HRT responses to question 14 were requests for further clarification of JTE expectations of what and how much should be taught in FLA classes.

JTEs

Data in Table 1 showed that 62% of junior high English teachers are positive towards the idea of forging new links with primary school teachers. As the recipients of students, they must know what has and has not been covered in FLA classes. In fact, MEXT specifically reminds teachers in the official junior high Curriculum Guidelines that a junior high teacher’s “syllabus should be designed in an appropriate manner with due heed paid to the connection with Foreign Language Activities at elementary schools,” (MEXT 2010, p. 8). Gaps are inevitable, however, and the survey asked JTEs about them.

Table 4 reveals that JTEs' self-assessed understanding (*haaku*) of their local primary schools' annual class plans and teaching content remain rather low. It contrasts levels of understanding between JTEs who have had experience of teaching FLA at primary schools (over 38% according to JTE Q14, Appendix B), and those who have not.

Table 4. JTE understanding of local FLA content (n = 513)

Understanding	Freq.	Percent	JTEs <i>without</i> FLA experience (n = 316) (%)	JTEs <i>with</i> FLA experience (n = 197) (%)
Quite a lot (<i>kanari haaku shiteiru</i>)	14	3	1	5
Some level (<i>aru teido</i>)	117	23	18	31
Not much (<i>sukoshi shika</i>)	241	47	48	45
None (<i>mattaku</i>)	141	28	33	18

Note. Data based on responses to JTE Q15 (Appendix B).

JTE experience in teaching FLA at primary schools does appear to raise their understanding of the FLA curriculum, on the whole, though not as much as one may expect. While those with experience appear to have more, as many as 18% of this group still responded “None,” with “a good deal” claimed only 4% more frequently.

Besides possible JTE humility, the number of “feeder” primary schools, from which new students arrive, may be behind the above responses. In data from JTE question 4 (Appendix B), the median and mode feeder school numbers were both 3, with a mean of 3.7. Thus, even if JTEs have taught several classes at a particular school, they cannot be certain that all students in their districts will have done the same activities, heard the same phrases, etc. This issue has dominated discussion of school transfer in regard to all subjects in a number of countries. Comber and Galton (2002) note that in the UK, even the best endeavours to provide valuable information can be frustrated. Much of the information provided by feeder schools can hardly be used beyond an initial new-student “grouping process” (Comber and Galton, 2002, p. 89); some primary teachers have seen their efforts to acquire such info, which they had

thought would be useful to ease transfer, as wasted. Regardless of the fact that almost 92% of Japanese primary schools use the same recommended text (Eiken, 2015, p. 43), the greater the number of (and distance to) feeder schools, the less sure the secondary teacher may be about student background homogeneity.

Even apparently ideal situations can prove a challenge. One JTE with extensive, “helpful” experience in four types of inter-school linking activities (JTE Q10) and “a good deal” of knowledge about the FLA curriculum (Q15) in the town’s only feeder school sums up the dilemma as follows:

It’s often said that the FLA system doesn’t require children to know things like word meanings, spelling or pronunciation, but in many cases they actually understand these. Still, I worry about whether *all* the students know so much, so I end up covering material from the previous year even though I know some students get bored. I’m just not sure how far I can trust my impressions of how much they really know. (reproduced from Mahoney & Inoi, 2014, p. 73)

JTEs, incoming junior high students, and even ALTs worry over this dilemma. An assistant with three years of teaching experience at both levels lamented that “junior high teachers simply assume the kids have not learned any English.” Again, the problem is not unique to Japan: these types of comments echo experiences of secondary teachers in studies based in the UK, in which foreign language professionals “openly state that they ‘start afresh’ in Y[ear] 7 regardless of what took place before...” (Evans, 2007, p. 302). Such tendencies prevail particularly in courses whose main aim is to promote positive attitudes (Martin, 2000). Fortunately, it seems that extra review at secondary schools of material covered in classes like FLA, originally designed to provide sensitisation to and encounters with foreign languages, appears more pedagogically acceptable than over-reviewing in more fully-fledged, competence-building foreign language classes (Martin, 2000, pp. 5-6).

Amid these uncertainties over where to begin, JTEs found linking activities more positive than their HRT counterparts (Table 5). The greatest differences appear to be less reliance on input from their ALTs, and more value placed on consultations with

HRTs on methodology and materials. Discussions of curriculum and goals, while predominantly useful, ranked lowest of the link types surveyed.

Table 5. Ranking of link type according to JTE perceptions of helpfulness ($n = 510$)

Rank	Primary-Secondary link type	Helpful (%)	Count(n)
1	Class observation at primary school	94	375
2	Other links	90	68
3	Discussion of methodology and materials with HRT	87	292
4	Discussion of links with ALT*	83	177
5	Discussion of curriculum with HRT	81	188
6	Discussion about FLA goals with HRT	81	164

Note. Results tabulated from JTE Q10 (Appendix B), with multiple responses accepted. *As JTEs generally do not come into contact with ALTs who teach exclusively at primary schools, ALT types were not specified.

The most helpful link form experienced by over 70% of JTEs appears to be traditional class observations, at which they presumably are able to note what kind of activities, phrases, and teaching methods pupils are being exposed to. Such class observations allow opportunities not only to perceive gaps or problems, but can yield supportive and often appreciative feedback as well. One JTE expresses respect and praise in open-ended question 20 (Appendix B):

While attending FLA classes, I felt the HRTs were making excellent efforts. The great enthusiasm I saw for the activities should be chalked up to the teacher's grasp of the children's actual [learning] situations, and to their research into teaching materials..." (from JTE data)

This JTE, and many others with similar experiences, added that their own classes need to be revised in line with some effective teaching methods that they had witnessed.

The most common example of "Other" link types that English teachers described were "delivered" or *dema*e classes conducted at primary pupils, with 27 mentionings. Nine teachers outlined several combinations of team teaching, with HRTs, ALTs or other assistants; seven mentioned various types of on-the-job training sessions including model classes and lectures; and three JTEs mentioned teaching practice activities. Five mentioned having either HRTs (4) or the pupils themselves (1) visit their junior high to observe first year English classes. Surprisingly, of all "Other" ideas

mentioned by only one HRT, the sixth grade pupil visit to a junior high mentioned above, and “a 9-year curriculum meeting at a municipal research centre,” were the only ones labelled “not helpful” by the JTEs who had experienced them. Still, a full 77% of JTEs overall felt the necessity of linking both school curricula (Q13a, Appendix B) more than HRTs had, and 53% saw it as possible in their communities (Q13b, Appendix B).

Turning to the JTE open-ended question 12 (Appendix B), which asked what kind of links should be furthered, 291 respondents brought up ideas similar to those of HRTs. Seventy-one JTEs mentioned either *naiyou* (content) in general or what were regarded as general synonyms, grouped in Table 6 under the second category, or the specific phrase *shidou naiyou* (teaching content), the main concern in the first category. Another 25 respondents mentioned “curriculum,” although none requested they be unified (*tou itsu*), with just two saying they should be “systematic” (*keitou teki*). Similarly, 16 JTEs want more emphasis on linking learning content (*gakushuu naiyou*), with almost as many looking for more coordination in regard to teaching materials, although they did not specify whether this meant materials should be created together, shared, or simply discussed.

Table 6. Top JTE descriptions of links still required ($n = 291$)

Rank	Comment category	Freq.	Other key words within category (n)
1	Teaching	114	Teaching content (36); Teaching methodology (13)
2	Contents	85	Curriculum (25); Learning content (16); How much (8); Covered in FLA (6)
3	Linked teaching materials	19	Shared (5)
4	Writing	18	Romaji (10); Alphabet (9)
5	Goals	9	Shared (2)

Note. Table created from JTE Q12 (Appendix B) using IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys 4.0.1. Again, comment overlapping remains despite numerous iterations.

New to the comments on what kind of links are lacking were those on Romanised Japanese (*romaji*). The system taught at primary school (*kunrei shiki*) differs from that taught in junior high English classes (*hebon shiki*), and has been identified in other studies as a source of concern for JTEs and confusion for students (e.g., see Yamaguchi & Tatsumi, 2010). Nine JTEs also requested specific links be

made in regard to teaching the alphabet. However, *romaji* confusion does not appear to be on the minds of primary HRTs, with not one mentioning of it in comments on improving FLA (Appendix A, HRT Q28), and only two in their question 14, which had dealt with link forms needed.

Primary and Junior High ALTs

As mentioned, this survey also queried assistant teachers at both school levels. Primary ALT question 18 and junior high ALT question 10 (Appendices C and D, respectively) asked for feedback on the helpfulness of links that respondents have either “witnessed or participated in.” It was worded as such in consideration of ALTs who do not speak Japanese well enough to participate directly in some linking activities at their schools, but who may have noticed them. Overall, direct or indirect primary ALT observation of links appears lower than that of junior high counterparts, with 58% and 71% respectively responding to at least one of the five main link types in Table 7 (i.e., excluding “Other”). The most common link type, “demonstration class at primary/junior high” was witnessed or participated in by 183 primary ALT respondents (47%), but by as many as 101 junior high ALTs (60%), which suggests that the latter group are more often asked to help with such activities.

As with other link tables in this paper, Tables 7 (primary ALT) and 8 (junior high ALT) have been ranked with priority given to those found most helpful rather than to frequency.

Table 7. Ranking of link type according to primary ALT perceptions of helpfulness
(*n* = 387)

Rank	Primary-Secondary link type	Helpful (%)	Count(n)
1	Consultation with jr high ALT	91	141
2	Consult JTE on teaching materials/methodology	90	138
3	Other	88	17
4	Consult JTE on teaching goals	85	122
5	Demonstration class at primary/jr high	84	183
6	Consult JTE on courses	83	114

*Note. Results tabulated from data in primary ALT Q18 (Appendix C).

Table 8. Ranking of link type according to junior high ALT perceptions of helpfulness
($n = 169$)

Rank	Primary-Secondary link type	Helpful (%)	Count (n)
1	Other	96	24
2	Consultation with primary ALT	94	78
3	Consult HRT on teaching goals	92	49
4	Consult HRT on teaching materials/methodology	89	66
5	Demonstration class at primary/jr high	87	101
6	Consult HRT on courses	78	51

**Note.* Results tabulated from junior high ALT Q10 (Appendix D).

One can see at a glance that all link types were helpful experiences for the majority of ALTs. For primary ALTs, it appears that general consultations amongst themselves and discussions of teaching materials and methodology with JTEs have been most helpful. The MEXT-assisted JET Programme offers regular opportunities for ALTs and JTEs to meet, mix, and exchange ideas on a host of issues; but most primary ALTs work for smaller ALT recruiting businesses and individual schools (Mahoney & Inoi, 2014) that, in general, do not hold such events. More recently, however, boards of education have been increasing the number of such mixers and extending invitations to a variety of ALTs.

Although this question did not ask for details on the consultations ALTs had engaged in, ideas expressed in primary ALT open-ended question 21 (Appendix C) on links they feel are needed can provide insight. For example, a first year assistant suggested that “regular consultations” between school levels “on goals, methods, and materials would lead to a smoother and more successful transition...” This sentiment was qualified by a third year assistant who noted that HRTs and JTEs together “need to structure the course and goals for students at elementary level,” but added that “time should be allocated for this.” The most frequently mentioned primary ALT ideas involved tighter cooperation on curriculum issues ($n = 42$ comments) in general. They called for more communication and consultation (35 comments) in regard to writing (18), reading and phonics (13 each), and grammar (12).

Reading the comments, one can see that the needs of ALTs who work at only one school level can differ from those who work at both. For example, one primary-only ALT insists that what is needed most are “demonstration classes” and “more education for ALTs on the curriculum in junior high.” Meanwhile, another ALT who already works at both school levels writes, “I believe actual English conversation time would be more useful than any sort of demonstration class.”

ALTs realise that one of their roles is to fill in gaps between schools. Yet one of the most valuable comments received in the primary ALT survey describes the deleterious effects of a large number of feeder schools. A privately-contracted assistant in Gifu, with seven years of teaching experience, intermediate Japanese skills, and a degree in education and linguistics, writes:

I teach at both elementary schools and junior high schools. I was put in both in order to “link” the curriculum among schools. While logical in theory, it is impossible for me to be a link because I have too many schools and go to each school too infrequently to have an influence. (from primary ALT data, Q27)

One may infer from this comment how the watering-down of resources, along with other compromised opportunities for communication, can hamper not only linking activities but overall FLA class quality.

Conclusion

With English becoming a core primary subject in just four years, Japan must find means of securing qualified teachers and assistants. The paper has provided evidence that ALTs, especially those with Japanese skills who teach at both levels, can facilitate transfer of some information across school levels. Yet it also reflects calls for more time for Japanese teachers at both schools to link in ways they believe most appropriate. With their increased involvement in foreign language education, HRTs want to know, but not be bound to, their local junior high first year curriculum. If they are to lead future English classes and evaluate pupils, it is only fair that they be given incentives, time, and opportunities to learn how to do so. JTE concerns about unknown

aspects of and approaches to FLA at each feeder school require local attention, whereas the issues of *romaji* confusion and teacher fatigue require immediate national-scale action. Not all problems can be solved by repeated calls for tighter teamwork alone.

While current forms of inter-school links have been shown to assist all four groups of teachers, the custom in Japan of reshuffling teachers annually, either to different grades or different schools, can result in the loss of individual teacher histories of interaction between primary-secondary school pairs, or even in temporary or permanent suspension of these hard-wrought links themselves. It is hoped that future link-related research in Japan's English education can build on the findings and observations herein.

This study attempted firstly to determine which link forms are found most helpful. HRT data suggests that consultations with ALTs are almost always helpful. The next most helpful form, though not chosen with great frequency, was of the "other" category, and included a wide variety of training (*kenshuu*) with JTEs and ALTs, offered by a range of sponsors. Another popular "other" link involved simply having a JTE teach a primary FLA class, presumably (but not necessarily) with the HRT learning through observation. Primary teachers found focussed discussions with JTEs on methodology the third most helpful link type, with consultations with junior high ALTs and discussions of goals and curricula with JTEs slightly less so.

Since even the "least helpful" form of link as revealed in this study was in fact found helpful to 66% of HRT respondents, these results do not suggest that any of the six link forms be discontinued. It does, however, reveal a loose ranking of priorities that could be incorporated into future link programme design. For example, training that offers HRTs opportunities to learn not only from each other, or from board of education lecturers, but also from JTEs and ALTs, could perhaps address the widest range of HRT concerns through specific, locally-targeted input. And while HRTs do want more clarity in regard to how much they should teach and, more crucially, *how*, they do not appear to want to laden pupils or themselves with the junior high curriculum.

JTEs found class observations at primary schools to be helpful most often, perhaps since they can thereby confirm what FLA classes are about, who is teaching

them, and how pupils typically participate in them. JTEs seem to appreciate balanced opportunities to exchange ideas with HRTs, through which both teachers may offer help and can learn from each other. The “other” category of links ranked second most helpful for JTEs, with team-teaching with HRTs or other instructors the most often cited. As for specific discussions, those about methodology were slightly more effective than those about goals or curricula.

The second aim of the paper was to apprehend what kind of links teachers would like to see beyond those they have experienced. HRTs and JTEs would both like to know in more detail on how much is expected of FLA classes, the aims of which have yet to be defined in terms of any particular skills, vocabulary, or targets. Although many HRTs have worked on instilling positive attitudes towards English and other cultures, they await guidance on how to select content for their FLA classes. Lastly, if they are soon to conduct evaluated English classes, HRTs throughout Japan will (and already do) require instruction in terms of foreign language teaching methodology beyond what they have acquired through arranged and incidental consultations with JTEs and ALTs, however helpful.

Notes

1. “An inquiry into establishing continuity between primary school foreign language activities and junior high English classes,” was funded by a 2011-13 Grant in-aid for Scientific Research (C), administered by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). The author was the principal investigator (topic number 23520743).
2. The author presented parts of this study at a JACET Language Teacher Cognition Seminar at Waseda University on 24 October, 2015.
3. At both school levels, some ALT contracts finish before the New Year; the timeframe for this survey may thus have reduced the number of possible ALT responses. Further, first-year junior high ALTs in particular may have hesitated to respond to several questions, as they had not yet had time to gauge any impact of FLA.

4. MEXT goals for FLA are defined as creating a “foundation of pupils’ communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages,” (MEXT, 2008, p.7).

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Appendix A: HRT Questionnaire (of questions covered in paper)

12. What kind of primary-secondary linking activities have you been involved in?
Please circle all relevant items. Also indicate whether each was “helpful” or “not helpful.”
13. Would you like to make more links for FLA with junior high English teachers?
14. For those who answered “yes” to Q13, what kind of links would you like to make?
Please describe in detail. For those who answered “No,” please give reasons.
15. What do you think about the idea of creating a linked primary-secondary curriculum?
- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| a) It is necessary. | 1) Yes | 2) No |
| b) It is possible in my school zone. | 1) Yes | 2) No |
28. What should be done to improve FLA classes at your school? Please tell us your thoughts.

Appendix B: JTE Questionnaire (covered in paper)

4. How many public primary schools are in your school zone?
10. What kind of primary-secondary linking activities have you been involved in?
Please circle all relevant items. Also indicate whether each was “helpful” or “not helpful.”
11. Would you like to make more links regarding English teaching with primary school teachers?
12. For those who answered “yes” to Q11, what kind of links would you like to make?

Please describe in detail. For those who answered “No,” please give reasons.

13. What do you think about the idea of creating a linked primary-secondary curriculum?

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| a) It is necessary. | 1) Yes | 2) No |
| b) It is possible in my school zone. | 1) Yes | 2) No |

14. Have you ever taught primary school FLA classes?

- 1) Yes 2) No

15. How much do you know about the annual curriculum and what is taught in FLA classes at primary schools in your locality?

- 1) Quite a lot 2) Some level 3) Not much 4) None

20. Please let us know of any thoughts or feelings you have had about FLA classes.

Appendix C: Primary ALT Questionnaire (covered in paper).

17. For those who teach at BOTH elementary and junior high: Are you able to reuse words and phrases introduced at the primary level in your junior high classes?

- 1 not at all 2 not often 3 don't know what they learned at primary school
4 yes, in general 5 yes, very much

18. If you have witnessed or participated in links between primary and jr high schools in your area regarding English education, please circle the letter that describes the nature of this linkage (multiple answers accepted). Then please circle whether you feel each type of link was helpful.

19. Do you think a primary through jr high English curriculum is:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|--------------|
| a) Necessary? | 1 Yes | 2 No | 3 Don't know |
| b) Possible in your locality? | 1 Yes | 2 No | 3 Don't know |

20. Is there a need for more links between the two school levels?

1 Yes 2 No 3 Don't know

21. If "Yes," what kind of links would be best? If "No," why not?

27. Further comments on FLA in Japan's elementary schools:

Appendix D: Junior High ALT Questionnaire (covered in paper)

10. If you have witnessed or participated in links between primary and jr high schools in your area regarding English education, please circle the letter that describes the nature of this linkage (multiple answers accepted). Then please circle whether you feel each type of link was helpful.

11. Is there a need for more links between the two school levels?

1 Yes 2 No 3 Don't know

14. For those who teach at BOTH junior high and elementary: Are you able to reuse words and phrases introduced at the primary level in your junior high classes?

1 Not at all 2 Not often 3 Don't know what they learned at primary school

4 Yes, in general 5 Yes, very much

Critical inquiry into critical reflection: Situated in the Japanese context

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Abstract

Reflection is often illustrated to be a vague concept with diversified interpretations. The levels of reflection, on the other hand, seemed to have reached some general consensus which comprises three levels, that is, reflection focusing on one's practice, then on teacher cognition such as beliefs and assumptions, and critical reflection, which encourages teachers to be an agent for change through reflecting on their historical, socio-political and moral contexts of schooling. The problem with this 'common framework' is that it seems to present a view that reflection is developed sequentially and that critical reflection is the utmost goal of reflectivity in reflective practice. In this paper, based on a study that she conducted, the author introduces not *levels* but *dimensions* of reflection; description, reconfirmation, *hansei*, reinterpretation, and awareness. The author, then, argues that reflective process is non-linear and recursive which is uniquely experienced and developed by different individuals, which she calls, a reflective continuum. The author concludes by arguing that, as important as it is, critical reflection should not be posited as the universal ultimate goal of reflective practice. She also argues that, with its cultural, linguistic, historical and political context in Japan, an introduction of critical reflection needs to be accompanied with sensitivity to such local particularities.

Introduction

Reflective practice has established itself as one major underlying philosophy of teacher education in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. In these contexts, reflective practice has made significant contributions to teacher development, which can be seen in the changes of the position of practicing teachers, namely, acknowledging teachers' tacit knowledge as professional knowledge, regarding practicing teachers as generators and producers of legitimate knowledge (Johnson & Golombeck, 2002; Schön, 1987), and viewing reflection as a form of development (Suzuki, 2014).

In spite of being a dominant discourse in teacher development, what is meant by reflection has often illustrated to be ambiguous and diversified (Day, 1993; Farrell, 2001; Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Jay & Johnson, 2002; McLaughlin, 2007). On the other hand, levels of reflection, as pointed out by Farrell (2015) and Larrivee (2008), seem to have come to some general consensus. Even though the terms used are different, the levels comprise the following three aspects, that is, reflection on one's practice, reflection on one's belief and

assumption, and critical reflection. It is often the case that critical reflection is regarded as the highest order of reflection (Watanabe, 2016a).

What is implied and which I reject is the notion that the types or categories of reflection stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other. In many frameworks, such as by Van Manen (1977), Zeichner and Liston (1996), McIntyre (1993), Jay and Johnson (2002), and Farrell (2015), taxonomies of reflection seem to be laid out in three stages or levels through which teachers need to pass to arrive at critical reflection which is posited as if the ultimate form of reflection. I argue that reflection cannot be described in hierarchical levels as the reflective process is non-linear and recursive, and that individuals may pass through several dimensions of reflection that are unpredictable and arbitrary, a process that I call the reflective continuum (Watanabe, 2016a, Watanabe, 2016b). I also argue that critical reflection, as important as it is, should not necessarily be regarded as the goal or the ‘highest’ form of reflection (Watanabe, 2016a).

Three levels of reflection

The categorization of the three levels of reflection and the association of critical reflection as the utmost level of reflection in teacher development seem to be based on the seminal work of teacher educator Van Manen (1977). He proposed a framework based on Habermas’s (1973) concept and classified types of reflection into three hierarchical levels associated with different theories of learning, that is, technical, reflectivity, and reflexivity. Following Van Manen’s framework, various models of reflection have been presented (Furlong & Maynard, 1995), many of which comprise the three levels and place critical reflection as the highest order reflection. The first level is often associated with reflection on one’s teaching practice focusing on one’s actions in teaching, such as giving assignments, asking questions, and monitoring students’ work (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). McIntyre (1993) refers to this level as “a technical level” (p. 44), where the concern of a teacher is to attain a given goal in a lesson. Jay and Johnson (2002) refer to this level as “description” of a matter, such as “a classroom concern, a recognized bias, an interesting theory, or a feeling” (p. 78). Farrell (2015) refers to this stage as “descriptive” and puts forward questions pertinent to this stage to be “What do I do?” and “How do I do it?” (p. 10).

The second level is reflection on one's practice through an exploration of, what we might call, teacher cognition, which comprises aspects such as belief and assumption. It involves teachers thinking of the underlying reasons for their actions in the classroom (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). McIntyre (1993) calls this level "a practical level" (p. 44), where the focus of reflection is to understand how types of actions are linked with one's assumptions, predispositions, values, and consequences. Jay and Johnson (2002) refer to the second stage as "comparative reflection" (p. 78), where individuals look at a matter from a variety of perspectives. This involves looking at and trying to understand a matter through different points of view that may be incongruent with one's own. Farrell (2015) refers to this stage as "conceptual reflection" (p.10) where one explores reasons behind one's practice. He presents questions relevant to this stage, such as "Why do I do it?" (p. 10).

The third and the most 'developed' form of reflection is critical reflection which is to examine one's teaching through sociopolitical and historical context one is embedded. The frameworks of most of the scholars mentioned above refer to this stage as critical reflection. McIntyre (1993) describes this critical or emancipatory level of reflection as individual teachers examining "wider ethical, social, and political issues" (p.44) that may have constrained or limited the freedom or effectiveness of their actions. Zeichner and Liston (1996) focus on embracing justice in the classroom as result of critical reflection, stating that teachers reflect on the ethical and moral considerations of their actions to see how they can achieve the enhancement of a more caring classroom or equity and justice in the classroom. Jay and Johnson (2002) illustrate this reflection as gaining a broader perspective in historical, socio-political and moral context of schooling. Farrell (2015) explains that this third level involves the teachers in looking at teaching through different perspectives such as through students, the school, and the community as well as the teachers themselves. Farrell (2015) further states, "critical reflection involves a process of unearthing and identifying previously unquestioned norms in society, the community, the school, and the classroom within the contexts in which they are practiced" (p. 96). Critical reflection, as we saw, shifts the focus of reflection from the inside to the context outside the classroom and examines teaching practice through its social, political, ethical, and moral embedment.

The review of the literature shows that critical reflection embraces two targets for change: the teachers' practice or views and the contexts in which teachers are embedded (Larrivee, 2008). The former is referred to as inward self-reflection focusing on teachers' own practice, beliefs and assumption. The latter is outward reflection, which involves

teachers focusing their attention to outside the classroom, such as “the social conditions in which these practices are situated” (Larrivee, 2008, p 344), and leads to prompt changes such as their textbooks, curriculum, ways of assessment, teaching schedules, and salaries. As we can see, outward reflection involves aspects of teaching in several stratum.

These two focuses of critical reflection are not disjointed but are regarded as a continuum. Moore (2004) explains this continuum; looking inwardly at oneself may be challenging at its onset, however, looking at oneself and students as entities embedded in the historical and socio-political contexts liberates one from ‘looking at oneself clinically inwards’ to ‘looking at oneself politically outwards’, which eventually leads one to bring out changes in the contexts they are situated. Smyth (1989) also describes the shift of inquiry from oneself to the institutional context in critical reflection:

When teachers are able to begin to link consciousness about the processes that inform the day-to-day aspects of their teaching with the wider political and social realities within which it occurs, then they are able to transcend self-blame for things that don’t work out and to see that perhaps their causation may more properly line in the social injustices and palpable injustices of society, which is to say that deficiencies in teaching can be caused by the manner in which dominant groups in society pursue their narrow sectional interest (p.7).

As Smyth’s quote indicates, the focus of critical reflection outward is regarded to lead the teachers from navel gazing or self-laceration (Brookfield, 1995; Farrell, 2015) to being an agent for change in the context they are embedded, which he illustrates, “teachers taking charge of aspects of their lives over which they have been prevented from gaining access in the past” (1989, p. 5).

As I discussed earlier, these frameworks of the levels of reflection seem to suggest the following two aspects; one is that reflection is illustrated to proceed in some sequential manner from what might be called more ‘basic’ to ‘advanced’ and the other is that critical reflection is posited as the highest, ultimate, or the final goal of reflection, and consequently, of teacher development. Firstly, the frameworks give the impression that one reflection precedes the other as a prerequisite step. It seems to show that teachers may start out to reflect on practical issues in their classrooms, then move onto examine their practice through teacher cognition, and finally engaging in critical reflection. Also, the frameworks seem to

suggest that critical reflection is the ultimate, desired, and most developed level of reflection which teachers need to aspire. Larrivee (2008) describes the importance and necessity of critical reflection in teacher development as follows:

Many advocates of reflective practice take the position that teachers should not only reflect on behaviors and events within the confines of the classroom but should include the influence of the larger social and political contexts. They deem teaching as ultimately a moral pursuit concerned with both means and ends and therefore consider critical reflection to be imperative for teaching in a democratic society (p. 344).

Decades earlier, Smyth (1989) noted the salience of teachers to engage in critical reflection in teacher development:

[B]eing able to locate oneself both personally and professionally in history in order to be clear about the forces that have come to determine one's existence, is the hallmark of a teacher who has been able to harness the reflective process and begin to act on the world in a way that amounts to changing it (p.7).

Advocates of critical reflection argue that critical reflection is necessary for changing education for the better as well as their own development.

Critical reflection in English language teaching

As critical reflection is the topic of this paper, it is necessary to briefly review the background of its concept. Critical reflection bases its roots in critical pedagogy which has its origin in Paolo Freire's (1970) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he argues that transformation of the oppressed requires the oppressed to become aware of oppression through reflection and taking action (Smyth, 1989; Van Manen 1977). The notion of critical pedagogy was adopted in the field of English language teaching by numerous scholars in 1990s. One such scholar was Canagarajah (1999) who, in his argument about the role of critical pedagogy in English language teaching, contrasts two communities, *the center* (italics in the original), the technological advanced countries of Anglo-American communities, and *the periphery* (italics in the original), post-colonial countries consisting predominantly of

non-native speakers of English. He describes the impetus of critical pedagogy: “the realization that education may involve the propagation of knowledges and ideologies held by dominant social groups” (p.3) has inspired the paradigm of critical pedagogy, which encourages teachers to have ethical responsibility to interrogate “the hidden curricula” (p. 14) of the courses that they teach and to situate learning to the socio-political realities, and to encourage students to gain a critical perspective in learning in order for them to “make pedagogical choices that offer sounder alternatives to the living conditions” (p.14). Canagarajah (1999) further contends that learning varies according to socio-cultural contexts of different communities, thus, pedagogical approaches, tasks, and materials from *the center* need to be scrutinized to the socio-cultural contexts of *the periphery*. This is in line with the view of Smyth (1989) who describes critical reflection as, “to critique and uncover the tensions that exist between particular teaching practices and the larger cultural and social contexts in which they are embedded” (p. 5).

Even though Japan has a long history with a type of teacher development through looking back at one’s own teaching with lesson study, reflective practice in Japan, where I conducted its study, is still rather in a preliminary stage in its incorporation as a form of teacher development. As reflective practice originates in a different sociocultural context, an incorporation of reflective practice into a study in a Japanese context is presumed to be a form of borrowing, the “conscious adoption in one context of policy observed in another” (Phillips & Ochs, 2004, p. 774).

It is suggested by some scholars that borrowing a methodology across cultural boundaries can be problematic (Silverman, 1993). Canagarajah (1999) points out,

methods are not value-free instruments of solely pragmatic import. They are ideological in embodying partisan assumptions about social relations and cultural values. Methods can reproduce these values and practices wherever they are being used (p. 104).

Canagarajah (1999) warns potential residual effects of such borrowing, that “dependency on imported products has tended to undermine the alternative styles of thinking, learning, and interacting preferred by local communities” (p. 104).

Along a similar vein, Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006) claims the need for post-method pedagogy, that is, pedagogy which takes into consideration of the contexts in which a method is implemented. He contends that English language pedagogy from the West has been

introduced and implemented into non-Western, non-native English contexts with little scrutiny. Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues that the borrowing of methods should be examined with the three principles, *particularity*, *practicality*, and *possibility*:

Particularity seeks to facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a true understanding of local linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities. Practicality seeks to rupture the reified role relationship between theorizers and practitioners by enabling and encouraging teachers to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize.

Possibility seeks to tap the socio-political consciousness that students bring with them to the classroom so that it can also function as a catalyst for identity formation and social transformation (2006, p. 69).

An introduction of reflective practice to the Japanese context draws on all three principles put forward by Kumaravadivelu (Watanabe, 2016b). Reflective practice accords with *particularity* because as a borrowed method, it may adapt nicely to the local practices of the participants. Nagamine (2014) notes that the reflective approach resonates with the post-method perspective. Holliday (1994) points out that various methodologies can be appropriated into non-Western, non-native English contexts, specifically noting that reflective practice is an approach that can be adapted for local cultural sensitivities. Reflective practice also aligns with *practicality* as it considers teachers to be creators and owners of knowledge as well as practitioners (Johnson & Golombeck, 2002). Then, reflective practice embraces *possibility* because it encourages the exploration of identity formation and shaping of teachers (Korthagen, 2004) and, as was discussed earlier, aims at and embraces social transformation through critical reflection (Van Manen 1977; Boud et al., 1985; McIntyre, 1993; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

The Study

I conducted a multiple case study (Watanabe, 2016b) to explore reflective practice with six in-service high school teachers of English as voluntary participants for the duration of seven months. The participants were drawn through mailing lists and an announcement made at teacher development seminars that I conducted. In the study, the teachers engaged in

weekly journal writing, monthly interviews, and three focus group discussion sessions. The monthly interviews and the focus group discussion sessions were recorded with the consent of the participants. As reflective tasks, the teachers were asked to read their past interview transcripts and journal entries, and to select reflective themes, which are recurring themes in their teaching practice or views (See Table: The Reflective Tasks and the Interventions). After the collection of the data from the three methods, I engaged in various ways of analyzing the data and I eventually used theme coding. The unique aspect of the data analysis process in this study was partially involving the teachers in the analysis process through their selection of the reflective themes (Watanabe, 2016b).

Reflective continuum

Through the analysis of the data, I found that reflection is a non-linear and recursive journey, where individuals travel in different ways and in different speeds (Watanabe, 2016), which I call the reflective continuum. The participants involved in the continuum in very unique and unpredictable ways. I identified various dimensions of reflection of their experiences in the reflective continuum, that is, description, reconfirmation, *hansei*, reinterpretation, and awareness. These different dimensions of reflection are not engaged in a rigidly ordered way, and that any dimension can be re-experienced at any time in various sequences (Watanabe, 2016b).

Description refers to “any written or spoken depiction of experiences or feelings” (Watanabe, 2016b, p. 50), thus, it applies to all the data that the participants generated. However, description is salient and important because it is a gateway to a *reflective continuum*. For any topic to be examined and explored, first, it has to be described. The topics that the participants described, in the early phase in the study, in the journals, interviews, and focus groups, were often re-examined in the later phases through other lenses of reflection, that is, reconfirmation, *hansei*, reinterpretation, and awareness. Also, what is described signifies what an individual chose to express and possibly to explore, which is a crucial first step in the reflective process.

Table: The Reflective Tasks and the Interventions

	Topics of focus group	Topics of interviews	Topics of journal entries
2007 September	1st focus group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting the other participants Questions about the study Suggestions for the first journal entry 		
October		1st interview Learning about the background of teachers and school contexts	1st journal entry Reactions to the first focus group discussion
November		2nd interview Asking specific questions about the journal entries	From the 2rd journal entry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-ended reactions Responses to questions posed by the researcher
December		3rd interview Asking specific questions about the journal entries	
	2nd focus group <u>Reflective task:</u> Participants ask questions and share experiences of participating in the study		
2008 January		4th interview <u>Reflective task:</u> Sharing interview transcriptions with each teacher	
February		5th interview <u>Reflective task:</u> Identifying their reflective themes	3rd (and final) journal entry Selection of reflective themes based upon re-reading past journal entries
March		6th (and final) Interview <u>Reflective task:</u> Discussion based on the last journal entry	
	3rd focus group <u>Reflective task:</u> Sharing feedback in the participation in the study		

Another dimension of reflection which I identified was reconfirmation, that is, the teachers “reconfirmed a commitment to a previously-expressed belief or idea” (Watanabe, 2016b, p. 51). What is salient in reconfirmation is that it involves the person to restate what is important. Reconfirmation is different from description in that reconfirmation indicates a narrowing of focus from all of which the participants generated. Reconfirmation involved the participants in recalling, identifying, and solidifying what was important to them. Even though reconfirmation is not accompanied with substantial changes in perception or viewpoint, it constitutes an important point on the reflective continuum as it involves individuals to “see again” and “say again” their original aspirations (Watanabe, 2016b).

Reconfirmation is a unique aspect of the findings of this study, which, to my knowledge, has not been previously identified or discussed in the literature of reflective practice. Farrell’s (2014) notion of ‘affirmation’, where individuals acknowledge their viewpoints or ideas, comes closest. In my study, I often came across instances of reconfirmation in the data. This may derive from the way I designed the reflective tasks in which I incorporated recursive activities, that is, the participants involved in rereading their interview transcripts and journal entries.

As one point in the reflective continuum, reconfirmation often led to reinterpretation and awareness. This was particularly salient when the participants chose their reflective themes while and after reviewing their journals and interview transcripts. Identifying the repetition of the topics in the journals and the transcripts reconfirmed and made the participants aware that those topics were crucial and important elements of their teaching practices.

Hansei is a dimension of reflection that is deeply ingrained and has widespread cultural resonance in Japan which is familiar in Japanese educational and work contexts. *Hansei* involves “looking back at one’s present or past practice, recognizing that it was not appropriate or satisfactory, and acknowledging one’s responsibility in its cause and improvement” (Watanabe, 2016b, p. 53). In the early phase of the study, I felt that my participants might lack a certain clarity about the concept of reflection precisely because of this widespread, and roughly similar concept. Thus, I tried to differentiate reflection and *hansei*; I avoided the use of the word, and attempted to clarify the difference between *hansei* and reflection such as in the second focus group discussion. Despite my efforts to clarify the differences, *hansei* continued to underpin the participants’ interpretation of the concept of

reflection. They often used the term *hansei* in their interviews, journals, and focus group discussions.

In the end, I added *hansei* to the reflective continuum as it is an integral part of professional development. Initially, I thought that *hansei* might be equivalent to what is referred to in the literature as ‘negative reflection’, which is illustrated as ‘undermining one’s confidence’ (Day, 1999; Ghaye 2011), ‘prevent[ing] teachers from learning’ (Boud et al., 1985), ‘feeling of inadequacy’ (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2010), experiencing ‘despair’ (Moore, 2004), or reducing one’s vision narrowly (Ghaye, 2011; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2010). The ways the participants used the term *hansei*; however, differed from these illustrations. Moreover, the analysis of the data showed that *hansei* could be instrumental in leading the teachers towards reinterpretation and awareness, and it also contributed to generating solutions. After an acknowledgement of one’s own wrong doing, *hansei* was often followed by a statement of conscious effort towards self-improvement and improved actions. This aspect of accepting and taking responsibility for a problematic situation is quite different from critical reflection, which deflects responsibility to external social structures, but also is different from simply regretting one’s wrong doing. Thus, I concluded that *hansei* is a meaningful stage where the participants engage in describing and understanding a problem, and consciously deciding that something needs to be changed for improvement of the situation. Eliminating *hansei* from the reflective continuum meant that I was ignoring or denying an integral tool that the participants brought into in their engagement in reflective practice (Watanabe, 2016b).

Reinterpretation means that individuals change their “actual notions, or understanding, of what had happened in the past and what could happen in the future” (Watanabe, 2016b, p. 56). Reinterpretation indicated participants’ viewpoints “moving from a highly subjective to a more objective frame of reference, that is, from seeing an episode from the inside, as a personal experience, to seeing it from the outside different perspectives, such as through others or through some theories” (Watanabe, 2016b, p. 56).

Awareness is one of the most well-known and common elements of reflection. Awareness involves more than simply identifying a salient aspect of one’s past or future activity. It means that one becomes able to “take an objective stance and a critical attitude towards one’s practice and beliefs” (Watanabe, 2016b, p. 57). As Morin (2005) writes, one characteristic of being aware is “the capacity to become the object of one’s own attention” (p. 359). My data suggests that awareness seems to be the point in the reflective continuum at which development is actually recognized and accepted.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the data brought me to question whether it is plausible for an individual to move in a linear fashion through the levels of reflectivity, as the literature that I reviewed earlier seems to propose. I would also like to question as to whether, critical reflection, the socio-political aspect described in some models of reflection, is in fact, the ‘hallmark’ of reflection.

As Burns, Freeman, and Edwards (2015) note, new directions in teacher cognition research emphasize the importance of taking sociohistorical background into consideration. My experience suggests that encouraging critical reflection to Japan may raise tensions and challenges of a sociohistorical nature. As my brief summary of Kumaravadivelu’s (2001) factors of particularity, practicality and possibility suggested, critical reflection is in inherent contradiction with many aspects of the Japanese cultural and educational context.

Given its particular political, historical, and linguistic context, Japan is a unique community in terms of Canagarajah’s (1999) categorization of *center* and *periphery*. In terms of language, it is a peripheral community, given that English is very much a foreign language in Japan. However, in its political and historical positioning, it is not truly peripheral. Before WWII, Japan colonized several Asian countries under a rule of imperialism and totalitarianism, an historical context which did not foster or encourage critical perspectives. Japanese people are widely seen to be ambivalent about protesting oppression or speaking against power, hesitating to raise their voices, especially in their immediate work environments. Thus, it could be said that this is a context which calls out for critical reflection; however, such an inquiry would require ample discourse and discussion (Freire, 1970) at all levels.

We cannot simply propose or position critical reflection as the ultimate goal of teacher education. Continuing with Kumaravadivelu’s framework, we confront the practicality of introducing a new relationship between theory and practice. Those who construct theory and those who practice are not, in a reflective framework, in opposition to each other but rather work together to construct theories that are grounded in practice and experience. This endeavor cannot be prescriptive in structure or linear in design. Prescriptive frameworks suggest that theories are bestowed by researchers upon practitioners. Reflective practice argues against this inherent separation of theory and practice and presupposes rather that teachers themselves possess and create knowledge. Teachers can be agents of their own

development. So a framework based on reflective practice would not involve researchers ‘giving’ knowledge to teachers, but would require researchers and teachers to explore teacher knowledge as potentially transformative in itself.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) describes possibility as what happens when socio-political consciousness is drawn forth, a process that can lead to the construction of new identities and to social change. Questioning the educational system may lead to questioning the political system, raising the possibility of new paradigms not only in Japan but around the world. Clearly, this may pose a risk to those who raise such questions. Questioning the ideological underpinnings of the government could place teachers, especially in public schools, in detrimental situations at their places of employment. Questioning the positioning of English as a required, indeed crucial factor for social and economic success may also lead to questioning the fundamental meaning of the occupation of English teacher. Interrogating the reasons that students are taught the globally dominant language will almost certainly be a contentious issue in countries where English is not a first language. In addition, such questioning may threaten our *raison d’être*, our very identities as teachers of English. Raising such questions may lead teachers and researchers well outside familiar comfort zones; while acknowledging the importance of venturing beyond the familiar, I question if this should be the desired outcome of teacher development for everyone.

I do embrace the tendency of critical reflection towards scrutiny, that is, towards examining our practices, assumptions and beliefs not only by understanding the context that they are embedded in, but also by accepting that such scrutiny may bring about radical change. In its focus on structural change, critical reflection requires cultural sensitivity, taking into account specific societal, linguistic, historical, and political aspects of the context where we choose to carry it out. I would argue that bringing frameworks of critical reflection into a new context must be sensitive to such factors.

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Second language poetry writing as reflective practice: A poetic inquiry into a pre-service teacher's experience of English language learning

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Abstract

This qualitative, case-study research investigated a Japanese pre-service teacher's English language learning experiences. Following Hanauer's (2010) methodological guidelines for second language (L2) poetry writing, the current study involved the analysis of five poems on the pre-service teacher's L2 learning experiences and the investigation of an analysis paper through which she analyzed each poem, found some common issues among the poems, and described her findings. The collection of her poems illustrated her history of L2 learning starting from the days when she studied English in junior high school to the moment when she was learning the language in an English speaking country. Also, the overall analysis of her written texts shows that poetry writing helped her to reflect on how she had studied English, discover problems of her L2 learning, and explore more effective ways to learn and teach English.

Introduction

Poetry writing is seen as an effective literacy practice in L2 contexts (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Hanauer, 2004, 2010, 2012; Iida, 2010, 2012, 2016, in press). This approach is supported with a theoretical framework for poetry writing as a form of *meaningful literacy learning* which Hanauer (2012) has developed to conceptualize L2 literacy instruction. This literacy learning is based on "a particular way of understanding and positioning the language learner and the language learning process" and involves the recognition of "the symbolic transformations in relation to self and world that learning a language entails" (Hanauer, 2012, p. 108). In other words, unlike traditional L2 pedagogy, this approach has great potential to make the language classroom dynamic and individual language learning more humanistic and meaningful (Hanauer, 2012; Iida, 2012). From an empirical viewpoint, however, it remains controversial how poetry writing helps L2 learners to reflect on their personal life experiences and to better understand themselves.

The aim of this article is to explore poetry writing as a form of reflective practice. This article begins by reviewing previous research on poetry writing and L2 writers. After clarifying the relationship between poetry writing and reflective practice from theoretical

viewpoints, it describes an empirical study on a Japanese pre-service teacher's experiences of English language learning. The main objectives of this study are to explore how the teacher understands and expresses her English language learning experiences in poetic form and to investigate the value of poetry writing as a form of reflective practice in teacher education programs. In so doing, this article intends to contribute to the development of the theory concerning poetry writing and L2 writers.

L2 poetry writing, reflective practice, and teacher professional development

Reflective practice is regarded as one of the key concepts for teacher professional development. This perspective is supported by many scholars in TESOL and applied linguistics. For instance, Farrell (2015) regards reflective practice as “central to a teacher’s development, because it helps teachers to analyse and evaluate what is happening in their classes” (p. xi). Richards and Farrell (2005) also think of reflection as “the process of critical examination of experiences, a process that can lead to a better understanding of one’s teaching practices and routines” (p. 7). In this light, reflective practice is a crucial process for teacher development and it helps language teachers to improve the quality of their teaching. As such, Farrell (2015) further argues the significance of reflection in terms of the relationship among individual teachers, their experiences, and teaching practice:

When we teach we are influenced by not only *who* we are but also by our *past experiences* because we have deeply ingrained values, thoughts, feelings, and needs which were formed since birth, all of which are inseparable from who we are and how we teach. Consequently, developing self-awareness through combination of contemplation and more conscious reflection on personal past experiences gives us a window into our philosophy of practice (p. 49, italics in original).

This perspective can be applied not only to teaching contexts but more broadly to our daily lives. In fact, Farrell’s (2015) concept of teacher reflection is very similar to theoretical and practical approaches for teaching poetry writing in the L2 classroom. For instance, Hanauer (2003) asserts that poetry “facilitate[s] the expression of individualized human experience in a new linguistic and cultural system and allow[s] the entrance into language classroom of diverse human experience and points of personal, cross-cultural contact (p. 85). Iida (2016) also regards poetry writing as involving “reflective and linguistic negotiation to construct meaning”, and it provides L2 writers with an opportunity “to reflect on their personal life experiences and negotiate how to construct and express their voices in the target

language” (p. 121). Furthermore, writing poetry is considered as a way to direct a process of critical self-reflection (Hanauer, 2010). In this way, poetry writing has the potential for writers to better understand themselves in the writing process (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Hanauer, 2004, 2010, 2012; Iida, 2012, 2016, in press).

As of now, the limited amount of empirical research on L2 poetry writing has been conducted in the field of applied linguistics, but one of the fundamental poetic inquiries was the investigation of ESL learners’ study abroad experiences conducted by Hanauer (2010). This study examined how the study abroad experience was characterized through poetry written by advanced ESL students who registered in ENGL 101: College Writing. Research findings showed that 78 poems written by these learners were categorized into five themes: self-positioning and the emotional response to language; emotional responses to academic classroom; contact with American students; negotiating American culture; and homesickness. Reflecting on the results, Hanauer (2010) concluded the study by arguing that poetry data set “attempts to reconstruct some of these moments and perhaps offers the opportunity of understanding these experiences from the perspective of the student who underwent this study abroad experience” (p. 129).

Iida (2016) also conducted another poetic inquiry in the EFL context. This research aimed to investigate the ability of Japanese L2 writers to write poetically and content of poetical descriptions concerning the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. This mixed-method research entailed both statistical analysis of 773 poems written by 78 Japanese EFL college students and in-depth analysis of thematic issues across the poems. The results of overall analyses of poetic data showed that the characterization of L2 poetry written by the Japanese students was short, personal, direct and descriptive and that poetry represented their direct responses and emotional insight into their earthquake experiences. Iida (2016) focused on L2 writers’ traumatic experiences in this study, but it provided evidence that Japanese L2 writers had the ability to write poems in the target language and that L2 poems can also be used as data to explore personal life experiences.

Previous studies show that poetry written by L2 learners can be used to explore personal life histories. However, poetic inquiry with L2 writers has been limited to personally significant and meaningful events such as study abroad or earthquake. Of particular interest in L2 poetry writing research is how Japanese EFL learners express their day-to-day life experiences. Reflecting on this concern, the current study addresses the following research question by focusing on a Japanese pre-service teacher who is seen as an advanced, highly

motivated EFL learner: In what way does a Japanese pre-service teacher understand and express her English language learning experiences in L2 poetry?

Methods

The current study employed a qualitative, case study research design. Following Hanauer's (2010) methodological guidelines for poetry writing as research, this study explores a pre-service teacher's experience of English language learning.

Participants

Initially, eleven English-major students registered in an English language teaching methodology course at a Japanese public university. This was a required course to obtain a teacher's license in the teacher education program. Ten students were college juniors and one is a senior who just came back from a one-year study abroad program in the United States. Nobody had participated in a teaching practicum, which they are required to visit and teach English either in junior high or senior high school during a couple of weeks.

The focal student in this study was a female college junior. She had studied English for twelve years under the Japanese educational system. She had been to Vancouver for a month to participate in a short-term study abroad program.

Data Collection

Data were collected in a five-day summer intensive program in 2013. It consisted of 15 lessons, 90 minutes per lesson, three lessons every day. The investigator designed this course by incorporating the following three components each day during the program: lecture on principles and techniques of language teaching; students' teaching demonstration; and poetry writing workshop.

A writing workshop was given in a way that each of the students was able to reflect on and understand their own English language learning experiences. This workshop was comprised of four stages. The first stage of this workshop was for the participant to understand the genre of poetry writing. Since she had very little experience writing poems both in Japanese and English, she learned the concept of poetry writing by reading poems written by other L2 learners. The purpose of this reading exercise was to understand how meaning was constructed and how the poet's voice was expressed in the text. The second stage was poetry writing. The participant was assigned to choose and reflect on five

unforgettable memories in her English language learning, free write each memory in Japanese, and create five poems in English. The third stage of this workshop involved the revision of poetry. While the participant joined a peer review session with her classmates, she had an opportunity to discuss one of her poems with the course instructor. This teacher-student conference was held as soon as she finished drafting her first poem. With feedback from the instructor and her classmates, she revised her five poems. The last stage of this writing workshop was to write a 500-word analysis paper in Japanese to explain her understanding of English language learning experiences. In this stage, the participant was assigned to analyze five poems, find common issues, and reflect on her emotional insights in participating in each language activity.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with methodological guidelines of L2 poetry writing (Hanauer, 2010). The analyses entailed the examination of five poems written by the participant and the examination of the writer's subject position in L2 poetry. The poetic inquiry involved literary, linguistic, and content analyses of each poem while recreating the writer's subject position expressed in the actual descriptions of the poem. Each poem was carefully examined from the aspect of the writer's specific perspectives, emotional contents and understanding of the experience.

In regard to the analysis paper, it was first translated into English and then analyzed thematically. The purposes of this thematic analysis were to identify some issues of the participant's L2 learning experiences and to make connections between her emotional concerns expressed in L2 poetry and her understanding of each memory of English language learning. The analysis was based on six phases of thematic analysis designed by Braun and Clarke (2006): becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Results and Discussion

Nanako Mizutani (a pseudonym) wrote five poems regarding her English language learning experiences. The order of the poems was as follows: *Hard Test*, *English Songs*, *My English Teacher*, *English in High-School* and *Go Abroad*. She begins with the poem which expresses her emotion of taking such a difficult exam.

Hard Test

*Big nervous and stress
I want to escape very much
But I can't now*

*I try my best
Memorize, forget...
Memorize, forget...
Memorize, forget...
Forget, finally master English phrases*

Why does my teacher give me such a hard test?

*After several years...
I realize that
His strictness was the representation of his love
That hard experience
Makes me happy now*

This poem consists of two different scenes: the first three stanzas describe a moment when she studied English as preparation for a difficult test in the past; and the fourth stanza addresses her emotional insights concerning that tough experience. It seems that the poet had struggled with the test and expressed negative attitudes toward studying English. These emotional concerns are clearly represented in such expressions as “Big nervous and stress” “I want to escape very much” and “But I can’t now” in the first stanza. As can be seen in the first line of the second stanza, however, she tried to work hard to earn good scores on the test. This stanza explains how she studied and prepared for the test. She used the same phrase, “Memorize, forget...” three times indicating her trial and error in learning English phrases. It seems that she finally memorized them and was ready for the test, but as she wrote in the third stanza, she was not sure why her teacher gives such a difficult test. While she had negative feelings about learning English in junior high school, the fourth stanza expresses her gratitude to the teacher. Owing to his strict teaching approach and her difficult experience in the past, she seems to be able to feel happy about learning English now. This poem indicates that this tough experience in junior high school was indispensable for Nanako in order not only to improve her English skills and but also to develop herself.

English Songs

*Boring and sleepy English class
Teachers voice trail away
Heavy, Dull, Gloomy air*

*Sudden English song
My heart changes in a moment
My eyes open widely
Fresh, Light, Joyful air*

*Sing English songs every day
Carpenters, The Beatles, Aerosmith...*

*Even now,
Hum English songs, before I know it
Encounter of wonderful English songs
Still make me happy*

The second poem describes a memory of English songs in her English language learning experiences. The first stanza depicts a moment when she sat in regular English class. Such words as “Boring”, “sleepy”, “Heavy”, “Dull”, and “Gloomy” represent her negative attitude toward language learning in the classroom. On the other hand, as described in the second stanza, a sudden encounter with an English song changed her attitude all at once. This change can be seen in the following expressions, “My eyes open widely” and “Fresh, Light, Joyful air”. English songs seem to motivate her in learning English. Such expressions as “Sing English songs every day” in the third stanza and “Hum English songs before I know it” in the fourth stanza describe her positive attitude toward English learning. Overall, the encounter with English music including Carpenters, Beatles, and Aerosmith was a clue for her to become fond of English and it maintained and developed her motivation for her language learning.

My English Teacher
*English teacher at a junior high-school
Not kind, interesting, wonderful in particular
Although
Almost all of students like her*

*She always believes us
Respect for our autonomy
Make us do by ourselves*

*We also believe her
Decide English games' rule by ourselves
Discuss some topics in English with our group
Did independent study of English*

*Sometimes angry us, but it's an appropriate treatment
Such acts may be popular among us*

In the third poem, Nanako explores some characteristics of one of her junior high school English teachers. This poem addresses the importance of establishing a teacher-student relationship in English lessons. This is reflected in such expressions as “She always believe us” and “We also believe her”. The poet also realizes that what matters is not what this female teacher’s personality is, but how she teaches English or how she takes care of the students. It seems that the teacher’s actions including respecting “our autonomy”, making us “do by ourselves”, and doing “independent study of English” helps the students to promote their English language learning. Furthermore, the poet reflects on why she liked the teacher. As described in the poem, while the teacher always puts a special emphasis on the students’ autonomy, she sometimes disciplines them with an appropriate manner. The poet thinks that the teacher’s approach to her students seems to be effective and helps to develop a good relationship between the teacher and students.

English in High-School

Become a high school student

Big expectation and tension

Hope to know something new and interest

What will we study in our English classes from now??

Contrary to my wishes,

There is nothing without “Exam English”

Disappointed, Boring, Sad

Is it true to improve my English skills?

Why do I study English?

Lose sight...

Darker and darker

While the first three poems involved English language learning in junior high school, the fourth one, *English in High-School* describes the poet’s emotional concerns for high school English. In the first stanza, the poet expresses her positive emotions for English language learning in high school. These emotions are represented in the word choice including “expectation”, “Hope”, “new”, and “interest”. The last sentence, “What will we study in our English classes from now??” also represents new challenges in English courses in high school. In contrast, the second stanza expresses her disappointment at the lessons in high school. This negative emotion is powerfully expressed in the third line, “Disappointed, Boring, Sad”. The third stanza also expresses her puzzlement in learning English. It seems that she loses her motivation and does not know why she learns the language. Actually, she

asks herself, “Is it true to improve my English skills?” and “Why do I study English?”. Such phrases as “Lose sight...” and “Darker and darker” indicate that she is at a loss what to do and this learning environment makes it quite difficult to motivate her to study English.

Go abroad

Last summer

My first studying abroad in Vancouver

Full of anxiety, tension, puzzlement

My speaking skill of English is poor

Try to communicate with people all over the world

India, Thai, Korea, Mexico, Brazil...

Not good at speaking English too

But we can do it

Surprisingly, but so delightful, glittering, interesting

Different mother languages

But we understand each other

By speaking only one language “English”

It’s a very wonderful thing, isn’t it?

The last poem describes her short-term study abroad experience in Vancouver. The first stanza depicts her emotional insight regarding her first time experience to study in a foreign country. As clearly described in the last line, she is “full of anxiety, tension, [and] puzzlement”. In the second stanza, she addresses her trial in communicating with others in the target language. It seems that she discovered that, although her English speaking skills are poor, she could communicate with her classmates or friends from India, Thailand, Korea, Mexico, and Brazil. This indicates that this successful experience empowers her and helps to develop her confidence in using English. So, that is why she feels “so delightful, glittering, [and] interesting.” Reflecting on this learning experience, she wrote her discovery in the last stanza. She seems to realize that, though we have different mother tongues, we are able to communicate and understand each other by using “only one language, ‘English’”. The use of a tag question, “It’s a very wonderful thing, isn’t it?” in the last line is seen as the representation of her emotion, which she would probably like someone to agree with her thought or be eager to share her successful experience with others.

The collection of five poems put in chronological order shows Nanako’s history of L2 learning starting from the days when she studied English in junior high school in Japan to the moment when she learned it in Vancouver. Each memory which is defined as significant by this Japanese L2 writer illustrates some key issues in her English language learning. The first

issue is English teachers. As can be seen in the first and third poems, Nanako describes memories of learning English with her teachers. From these poems, we can understand that they have positive effects on her and her English language learning and more importantly, she really appreciates them. In her analysis paper, she explains the importance of building a teacher-student relationship:

As I described in Poem #3, my 9th-grade English teacher placed an emphasis on student autonomy and avoided controlling us too much. For that reason, there was a strong feeling of trust between the teacher and the students. I believe, therefore, in order to foster students who think and act by themselves, it is important for teachers to offer communicative language lessons [emphasis added] rather than textbook-based instruction in a teacher-centered approach, one that stresses rote memorization and grammatical explanations.

The second issue of her L2 learning is motivation. In the second poem, she clearly describes how English songs changed her attitude toward English. Although she felt bored in regular English class, music was a trigger for her to become fond of and get interested in studying English.

In junior high school, I always memorized sentences and vocabulary from the textbooks, and I worked solely on reading comprehension of the textbook passages. From time to time, we had the chance to listen to an English song or learn about peoples' lives in English-speaking countries. I was thrilled to learn that there is a unique and interesting world beyond Japan [emphasis added]. In this respect, I think that it is necessary for teachers to develop students' motivation to study English harder while they provide them with a variety of topics, for example, music, customs, geography, to make them eager to learn more [emphasis added].

While English songs promoted her to learn the language, exams demotivated her to work hard. For instance, the first poem describes her uncertainty why she needed to study for a difficult test. In addition, the fourth poem addresses her struggle or frustration under the situation where she had to study for college entrance exams in high school English lessons. This issue is also clearly described in her analysis paper:

As I wrote in Poem #4, all my classes were taught in the style of The Grammar-Translation Method, where accuracy in both reading and writing classes was for university entrance exams. As a result, I lost sight of the purpose of learning English and I didn't know if the English that I was learning was practical or not [emphasis added]. That is why a teacher must inform students how and when the target English is used.

A learning environment is also another factor to affect Nanako's L2 learning. As seen in the fifth poem, she discovered the nature and significance of L2 learning in Vancouver. What she experienced abroad was completely different from how she studied English in Japanese secondary school. In Vancouver, she realized and recognized that English was a medium for communication by using the language practically with other L2 learners. She clearly mentions this point in the analysis paper while arguing what approach can possibly be effective to develop communicative English skills in the Japanese L2 classroom:

Students must understand that *English is not just a subject but a language, a means of communication among people* [emphasis added]. ... In my opinion, teachers should use Content-based Instruction or Task-based Language Teaching approaches that focus on content and tasks related to daily life. In so doing, *language learning should not be just for an entrance examination, but rather students should be able to learn English that they can use in the world beyond the classroom* [emphasis added].

Overall, the collection of poetry describes significant moments regarding Nanako's English language learning. Each poem expresses her direct and emotional concerns for each language activity she experienced. The current study also shows Nanako's patterns of voice construction in L2 poetry writing. One pattern is the usage of emotional words. She was inclined to use such emotional words as *boring, anxiety, tension, sad, or happy* directly to express her emotions. Instead of using indirect expressions (e.g., metaphors), she seemed to attempt to communicate her voice in a way that she describes and recreates each memory in the text. This finding provides empirical support of Iida (2012, 2016) that poetry produced by Japanese L2 writers is direct and descriptive. For Japanese L2 writers, the use of metaphors may be challenging because it requires a high level of language proficiency and various repertoires to express their emotions in the target language. Another feature is, as seen in the first and second poem, how Nanako organizes poems. All her poems consisted of three to four stanzas and she made connections between the past event and her current situation in the text. In the first poem, for instance, while Nanako described how she studied and prepared for the vocabulary test in the first three stanzas, she reflected on and addressed her current concerns for English language learning in the last stanza. This point is also reflected in the usage of such phrases as "after several years", or "now". From this viewpoint, poetry writing allowed Nanako not only to revisit and recreate each of her significant memories of L2 learning but to reflect on her personal experiences. In other words, writing poetry was both literacy and reflective practice for the L2 writer and provided her with an opportunity to

better understand herself as an L2 learner and a future English teacher.

Conclusions

The current study has investigated the way a pre-service teacher expresses and understands her English language learning experiences through poetry writing. The collection of five poems written by a Japanese female pre-service teacher presented her direct and emotional responses to her L2 learning experiences. This study also reveals that poetry writing was an effective approach for the L2 writer to understand her different learning approaches, discover some issues of her L2 learning (e.g., English for entrance exams, a lack of learning communicative English), and explore more effective ways to teach English in Japan (e.g., Content Based Instruction, Task Based Language Teaching). Furthermore, it exemplifies the usage of poetry writing as a way to investigate L2 writers' personal experiences.

The current study focused on a pre-service teacher and examined her L2 learning experiences through poetic data. However, both practical and methodological approaches for poetry writing employed in the current study can be applicable to in-service teachers as well, in a way that they can reflect on and explore their own teaching in the classroom setting. As discussed, poetry written by an L2 writer is descriptive and clearly depicts where language learning takes place, to whom the poet speaks English, how she learns/uses the language, and what she feels about in learning/using it. Writing poems concerning specific students, certain classroom activities, or problems that teachers have encountered can allow them to observe, analyze and understand what is happening in the classroom and provide an opportunity to explore and improve their teaching. This is one feasible way for individual teachers to engage in teacher professional development. Most importantly, poetry writing in the target language has the potential for L2 writers to negotiate and express their emotions more directly (Iida, 2016) and it can help Japanese teachers of English to reflect on their teaching experiences by putting their emotional insight at the center of the reflective process and to better understand themselves as teachers and life-long learners of English.

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Interviewing CLIL Lecturers in Japan: Different Discourses

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1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been introduced in European countries in the mid-1990s to follow the European Union's (EU) multilingual policies. The European Commission (1995) issued the 2 + 1 policy, suggesting that citizens in the EU countries should learn their mother tongue plus two community languages. It was followed by the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the Action Plan in 2003, and more recently the Bologna Process in 2010, which advanced the multilingual policies further, implementing the European Higher Education Area to promote the exchange of university students among the nations (Fortanet-Gomez, 2013, pp. 72-73). Thus, in the EU countries, CLIL has been introduced to realise their multilingual policies to increase mutual understanding in the multiethnic communities and to promote the mobility of EU citizens in the global contexts.

English medium instruction (EMI) courses at tertiary education has been encouraged in Japanese educational policies in the last decade to respond to the globalised economy (MEXT, 2011). This preliminary study examines realisations of EMI-CLIL courses in Japanese universities and discourses behind. In this paper, I take the broad definition of CLIL (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008), including EMI lectures to which the conceptual frameworks of CLIL may not explicitly or intentionally be applied, since it reflects the contexts of CLIL implementations I investigate. Three research questions are addressed here: (1) how have EMI-CLIL courses been introduced and implemented in Japanese universities?, (2) how do the CLIL lecturers in the context perceive CLIL implementations?, and (3) what are the underlying discourses in the implementations? Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain lecturers' perceptions of CLIL in higher education in Japan.

These inquiries are explored in terms of two conceptual frameworks: Freeman's paradigm of *hermeneutic research* (Freeman, 1996b) and Borg's concept of *contextual factors* (Borg, 2003, 2006). These conceptual frameworks are referred in the discussion of this study. Freeman (1996b) describes the shift in teacher learning from *the process-product paradigm*, in which teacher's behaviour is taken as 'indicator of the underlying individual cognitive processes' (ibid: 354), to *the hermeneutic paradigm*, which focuses on how teacher's understanding of the worlds are interpreted by

researchers in a particular context (ibid, p.360). Distinguishing *local* and *professional languages* on the basis of the concept of Discourse/discourse in Gee (1999), Freeman (1996a) interprets language teacher's cognition from their use of these two types of languages in the interviews. The notion of *context* in teacher learning is taken into Borg's framework, which categorises four elements of *language teacher cognition*: *schooling*, *professional coursework*, *classroom practice* and *contextual factors*. In his revised diagram, *classroom practice* is illustrated as part of *contextual factors*, which also include external contexts *around* the classroom (Borg, 2006, p.283). The following section first reviews language education policies in Japan, which have led to CLIL implementations.

2. Language Education Policies in Japan¹

Japanese higher education has been encouraged to intensify English education and improve its internationalisation since the early 2000s. The strategic plan to cultivate 'Japanese with English abilities' was presented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2002.

With the progress of *globalization in the economy and in society*, it is essential that our children acquire *communication skills in English*, which has become a common international language, in order for living in the 21st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the further development of Japan as a nation. (MEXT, 2002, my emphases)

The Action Plan was issued in the following year to encourage university reforms for developing human resources who can actively work in global contexts using English immediately after graduation (MEXT, 2003). In contrast to the multilingual policies proposed by the European Commission, the MEXT's policy focuses on communication skills only in *English*, which is the only language students in public secondary schools, and most private schools, learn as a subject for six-years as a required subject before university². The plan for 'Japanese with English abilities' also indicates that the purpose to improve English communication skills is for the growth of Japanese economy in the globalised society, not for mutual understanding in the multiethnic community.

In 2008, 'Global 30', which is later called 'Top Global University Project', was also launched to increase the number of international students enrolled in Japanese universities up to 300,000 by 2020. The plan has initially provided funding to 13 universities selected as centres for internationalisation in 2009, and to 37 universities in

2014 (MEXT, 2009, 2014). These movements have corresponded to the government-industry-academia strategic plan to provide ‘global human resources’ for Japanese economy (METI, 2010). The promotion of EMI lectures has been explicitly stated in some policy documents: one such example is ‘the Promotion of Human Resource for Globalisation Development’ (Cabinet Office, 2011), which encourages universities ‘to offer unique and challenging curricula (e.g., *classes taught in English*, requiring overseas studies) and class methods (e.g., small-group education, composition of faculty), and to promote September entrance and the semester system’ for international students (ibid, p.13, my emphases). ‘Higher Education in Japan’ issued in 2012 also describes the policy as follows:

Amid ongoing globalization, in order to develop an educational environment where Japanese people can acquire the necessary *English skills* and also *international students can feel at ease to study in Japan*, it is very important for Japanese universities *to conduct lessons in English* for a certain extent, or to develop courses where students can obtain academic degrees by taking lessons conducted entirely in English. [...] Of course, such universities still also provide substantial Japanese-language education courses.
(MEXT, 2012, my emphases)

Following the government language education policies, it is reported that about 32% of universities have provided EMI undergraduate courses in 2014 (MEXT, 2015).

Thus, as Tsuchiya & Murillo (2015) note, the introduction of CLIL in Europe could be ‘proactive’ (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010), promoting the bilingual and multilingual education, while CLIL (or EMI) in Japan has been implemented exclusively in English to meet its economic demands, which thus seems to be ‘reactive’ (ibid). In the context of higher education in Japan, how CLIL has been introduced and how it is perceived by lecturers is of my central interest. To address the issue, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three CLIL practitioners at Japanese universities.

3. Interviewing CLIL Lecturers

Teachers’ perceptions of CLIL in higher education has been investigated from different perspectives in existing research in European contexts: Saarinen & Nikula (2013) examined the educational policies in Finland and interviewed teachers and students, who were involved in international degree programmes in higher education,

identifying the dominant role of English in the context. Costa (2013), on the other hand, interviewed subject specialists in CLIL courses at university in Italy, revealing their resistance towards teaching language aspects.

This study examines three Japanese CLIL lecturers in different institutions in 2014-2015, using semi-structured interviews: *Fukuda*, who specialises in International Relations, *Hayashi* in English Education and *Ito* in English Language History (name anonymised). Both *subject* and *language teachers* with different expertise were included in the informants to have an overview of CLIL practices in Japanese universities : Fukuda and Hayashi's CLIL courses are categorised as into *subject teacher led projects*, while Ito's as a *language teacher led project* (Clegg, 2006). On the basis of the survey conducted in higher education in Italy (Costa & Coleman, 2013), seven question statements were prepared for the semi-structured interview (see Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted individually in Japanese and audio-recorded³. The time lengths of the interview data vary from about 20 to 60 minutes (about 10000 to 25000 letters in Japanese). The data was transcribed and analysed with NVivo (QSR, 2014), applying a thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Takagi, 2015) to 'identify key themes in text' through coding (Guest et al., 2015: 17). Although the coding was conducted only by me, the codes annotated to the transcriptions were reviewed three months after the initial coding to enhance the validity of the analysis. A discourse analytic approach was also applied for the qualitative analysis.

4. The CLIL Courses

The three interviewees are experienced male lecturers with master's and/or doctoral degrees from universities in the UK or the US, teaching at different universities in the eastern part of Japan (see Table 1). Fukuda teaches in the department of international studies at a large middle-level private university with more than 20 schools. He has coordinated an EMI-CLIL course, which is part of a minor major programme called 'Japanese studies for global citizens' and provides elective introductory courses both in sciences and humanities for undergraduate students from all the departments, i.e. 'Japanese engineering and technology' and 'Japanese popular culture'. Each class is taught either by an individual subject teacher or several subject teachers in an 'omnibus' style, which is a lecture series conducted by several subject teachers. About 25 students are enrolled in a class, and only international students or students who are going to join or have returned from study abroad programmes are qualified to attend the course. Presentations and essays are assigned for the course

evaluation. Most teachers in the programme have attended a one-week CLIL methodology training for two years (two weeks in total), which were offered by the university.

Hayashi is an applied linguist, teaching in the English education department at one of the old and prestigious private universities in Japan, which consists of more than 15 schools. He has individually implemented EMI lectures in his undergraduate and graduate seminars, i.e. ‘advanced phonetics’ for third/fourth year undergraduate and ‘English language teaching’ for graduate students. All the students major in English education and the class size is relatively small (10 to 15 students per class). Presentations and essay writing are required for the assessments, and the master’s dissertations should also be written in English as a department policy. He regards himself as both a subject and language teacher, and previously taught subject classes in English at a university in the US. Although Hayashi preferred the term EMI, rather than CLIL, his course was taken into this study on the basis of a broad definition of CLIL.

Table 1: Three CLIL courses at universities in Japan

	Fukuda Global Education Centre	Hayashi English Education	Ito Language Centre
Course	Minor Major Programme (elective) Japanese Studies for Global citizens	Undergraduate elective courses Advanced Phonetics Graduate required courses English Language Teaching	1 st year required courses, General English classes CLIL classes (Global issues, History, Literature, etc.)
Teacher	Subject teacher, 5-6 core teachers + about 10 teachers who teach once or twice	Subject/Language teacher, 1 teacher (himself)	Language teacher, 70+ language teachers
Student	25 undergraduate students in different departments	15 undergraduate, 10 graduate students in English Education	2000+ undergraduate students in different departments
Requirement	Students who studied abroad, international students	None	None
Assessment	Presentation, Essay	Presentation, Essay, MA dissertation	Presentation, Essay, Written exam
CLIL Training	CLIL Seminars (2weeks)	Teaching in the US	CLIL Seminars, CLIL booklets

Ito’s expertise is English language history and he teaches at another established private university, whose size is slightly smaller than the other two universities, about 10 schools belonging to the university. He has planned and organised a university-wide required English course for the first year undergraduate students, which involves more than 2000 students and about 70 language teachers. Students are streamed into classes

of 30 students each. Students have a general English class in the first term and a CLIL class in the second one. The assignments include presentations, essays and written exams. The language centre offers CLIL methodology booklets and seminars to the teachers. The next section will describe the three lecturers' perceptions of the CLIL courses, which were obtained through the interviews.

5. Discourses underlying the CLILs

In the interviews, the three lecturers stated both advantages and difficulties which were recognised through the implementations of CLIL. Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the coding scheme added to the transcripts of the interview data (see Appendix 2 for the code descriptions). Each code was first annotated to a distinct theme in the texts (i.e. *Teaching skills*), and then those codes were classified into hierarchical categories (i.e. *Teaching skills* is placed under the supra-categories *Expected* and *Outcomes*).

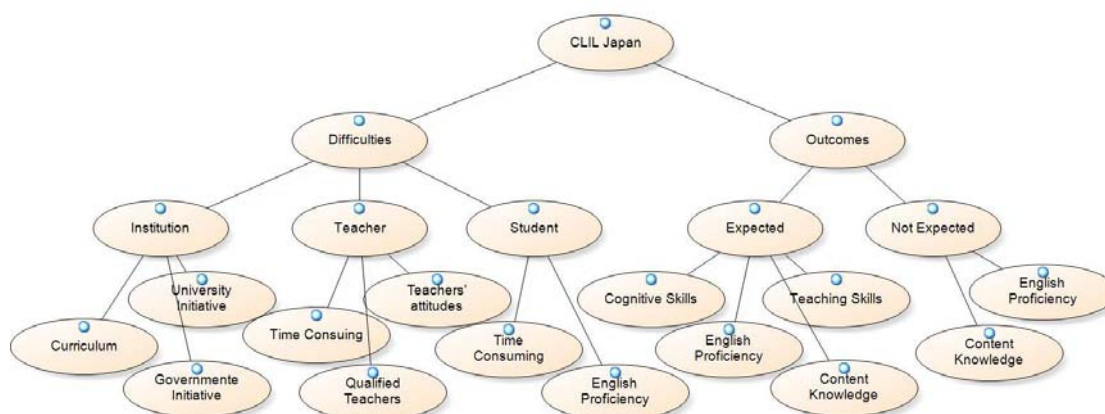


Figure 1: Lecturers' perceptions of CLIL in Japanese universities

The code *Difficulties* includes three sub-codes, *Student*, *Teacher* and *Institution*. Another supra-code *Outcomes* is divided into two branches, *Expected* and *Not Expected*. The sub-code *Time Consuming* is categorised into two supra-categories, *Student* and *Teacher* as Hayashi described that implementing CLIL requires more time for both teachers and students.

The sub-code *English Proficiency* has three supra-codes: *Difficulties-Students*, *Outcomes-Expected* and *Outcomes-Not Expected*. All of the interviewees find difficulties in implementing CLIL at tertiary level without students' sufficient English proficiency (*Difficulties-Students*). Two teachers (Fukuda and Ito) express lack of conviction to the claim that CLIL can improve students' English proficiency (*Outcomes-*

Not Expected), Hayashi, on the contrary, supports the claim (*Outcomes- Expected*). The former two teachers, who have organised respective CLIL courses, also found it difficult to recruit qualified teachers for their CLIL courses and also to change their colleagues' negative or uninterested attitudes towards CLIL. There are another three sub-codes under the supra-code *Institution: Curriculum, Government Initiative, and University Initiative*. Fukuda particularly asserts that the government and his university should have more initiative to introduce EMI-CLIL lectures. Hayashi also feels that the current curriculum of his department needs to be improved and actually plans to reform it, introducing EMI-CLIL classes at an earlier stage, for example, from the first year undergraduate courses.

The three interviewees have distinct expectations for possible outcomes from the CLIL implementations in their universities. Fukuda emphasises that CLIL benefits improving teaching skills of faculties from his experiences of attending the CLIL methodology training sessions and positive responses from his students after he applied the approach to his teaching. The utterances in the wavy line are related to *classroom practices* in Borg (2006):

Excerpt 1

いい点は、あの FD ですね。日本語でやってもいいと思います。だから全学部の教員にやってほしいなと。私も CLIL の研修を受けてから、授業が楽しくなりました。学生の反応がよくなるんで、楽しくなりました。

CLIL is a good practice for faculty development, isn't it? We should do the CLIL methodology seminars in Japanese to all faculty members. After attending the seminar, I came to enjoy my teaching more because students take part in my lectures more actively [than before]. (Fukuda: Outcomes-Expected-Teaching Skills)

Ito also shares Fukuda's opinion, supporting the positive effect of EMI-CLIL on teaching skills. Hayashi shows a different view, explaining that the aim of the introduction of EMI-CLIL to his seminars is to deepen students' understanding of content knowledge through learning subject matter in English, which is also an aspect of *classroom practices*:

Excerpt 2

英語で論文書いたり、英語で授業するのは、そういうこと [内容の理解]を目

指しているからやるので、英語の練習にしかないなら、英語でやらないよ。
だってここはアカデミックなことを学ぶところなので、英語は単なる道具なんだ
から。でも英語でやることによって、コンテンツの理解が深まるなら、まさに大
学のやるべき責任ですよ、英語でやっていいじゃない。

I lecture in English and ask students to write in English to [deepen the
understanding of the content]. If it's just for English skills, I won't do it.
Because a university is a place where students learn academic subjects and
English is just a tool. But if we teach in English and it deepens their
understanding of content, it is what a university should do, shouldn't it? So we
should conduct [lectures] in English. (Hayashi: Outcomes-Expected-Content
Knowledge)

In the first few lines in the wavy line, Hayashi explains that he has applied EMI as a classroom practice for students' deeper understanding of subject contents (*classroom practice*). In the latter part, on the other hand, the underlined utterance, 'it is what a university should do, shouldn't it?', can be interpreted as his recognition on the responsibility of higher education, which is *a contextual factor outside the classroom*. Hayashi mentions that EMI-CLIL lectures are time-consuming since students take more time to understand content in English, which can be a disadvantage. However, paradoxically, he explains that this time-consuming process could have a positive effect on enhancing their content learning.

Cognitive skills are another expected outcome of CLIL Ito pointed out. Ito claims he has implemented the CLIL course to develop human resources who can work in a global context after graduation, which has been encouraged in the government policy:

Excerpt 3

[CLIL では]新しい内容を英語で学んで、それで考えて、それでほかの人と一
緒にディスカッションとかして、最後は発信するわけですよ。＜中略＞ 社会
に出てからも 職場で、たとえば、ある仕事に従事して、新しい仕事に関する知
識を、インターネットから英語で仕入れる。それについて、職場の同僚と検討し
て、最終的には、企画書にしたりとか、プレゼンテーションにしたりとかする。
＜中略＞実際に社会に出てからの英語の使い方が一致するんですよ。

In CLIL classes, learners learn new content knowledge, think about it through discussions with others, and present their idea in English. [...] In a context of global business, workers need to search new knowledge from the Internet in English, discuss with colleagues, and report or present the ideas [in English]. So, the way to use English [in CLIL] is similar to the one students will experience in a working place [in the future]. (Ito: Outcomes-Expected-Cognitive Skills)

Ito expects that CLIL can provide opportunities for students to acquire necessary cognitive skills through English, which are necessary to work globally, using English. Again, Ito's utterance in the wavy line is a description of *classroom practices*, and in the latter part, 'the way to use English [in CLIL] is similar to the ones students will experience in a working place [in the future]', he relates the EMI-CLIL course to a broader context, *the globalised society outside the classroom*.

6. Concluding Remarks

This article first reviewed the language education policies in higher education in Europe and Japan. Three university lecturers' perceptions of EMI-CLIL were investigated through semi-structured interviews qualitatively using a thematic analysis and a discourse analytic approach. The findings show different discourses underlying the CLIL implementations, which are summarised as below:

1. The language policies:

Differences in social economic rationales of CLIL implementation between the EU countries and Japan were identified: CLIL in Europe, is 'proactive' (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010), adhering to the bilingual and multilingual education policy in the EU, whereas, in Japan, the introduction of CLIL seems to be 'reactive' to provide human resources with English proficiency for its economic purposes (Tsuchiya & Murillo, 2015).

2. Discourses behind the implementations of CLIL:

Different discourses are underlying in the implementations of CLIL at higher education in Japan: Fukuda expects that the introduction of CLIL will develop teaching skills (*classroom practices*) although he suggests that the government and the university should have more initiatives to implement CLIL courses; Hayashi emphasises the advantage of EMI lectures to improve students' English proficiency and content knowledge, which he assumes a responsibility of higher education (*classroom practices* and *institutional*

factors); while Ito claims that CLIL can enhance students' cognitive skills, which are necessary for work in a global context in the future (*classroom practices* and *global factors*).

Through the interpretation of the interviews data (c.f. Freeman 1996b), it is indicated that the teachers seem to be aware of the influences of the EMI-CLIL on both *classroom practices* and *contextual factors outside the classroom* (Borg, 2006). The latter includes two layers: *institutional* and *global contexts*. The results chimes with the notion of complexities of language teacher cognition described in Sasajima (2014), who places importance on contextual and cultural factors in a local community, in addition to language teaching. Interpreting the government and institutional policies from their perspectives, the lecturers seem to localise and legitimate the CLIL implementations. This study is, however, still in the preliminary stage and only part of the analysis was reported here. Further analyses on differences in perceptions of CLIL between language and content lectures, for instance, could be investigated with a larger set in future research.

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Notes

¹ An early version of the review of the language policies was published in Tsuchiya & Murillo (2015).

² In 2011, adhering the current course of study, 'foreign language activities' has been implemented at the fifth and sixth grades in primary schools. In principle, English is chosen as a foreign language used in the activities and the class is offered only once a week not as a subject to be assessed but as just 'activities' at this stage (MEXT, 2008).

³ Excerpts in English in this article were translated by me from the original interview transcripts in Japanese.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Could you explain about your CLIL course briefly?
2. Could you tell me more about the course? When did you start the programme? Is it a required or elective course? Are there any requirements to fulfil to take the course?
3. What is your motivation to implement the CLIL course?
4. About your students: How old and what nationalities are they? What is their English level/proficiency? Where did they study previously?
5. About teachers: Are they subject teachers or language teachers? Do you have a course coordinator? Did teachers attend any CLIL methodology course?
6. About assessments: How do you assess students' achievement in the course? Do you evaluate their understanding of content or language skills?
7. Do you think your CLIL course is effective to teach both content and language? Are there any difficulties or problems?

Appendix 2: Code Descriptions

Codes	Descriptions
CLIL	Codes related to CLIL implementations
Difficulties	Difficulties in implementations of CLIL
Student	Difficulties in students
Time Consuming	Students take more time to understand subject matters in English.
English Proficiency	Students' English proficiency is not sufficient for CLIL courses.
Teacher	Difficulties in teachers
Qualified Teachers	There are not enough qualified CLIL teachers.
Time Consuming	Teachers spend more time to prepare CLIL classes and to assess students' performance.

Teachers' attitudes	Some teachers have negative/uninterested attitudes towards CLIL.
Institution	Difficulties in institutions
Government Initiative	The government initiative to introduce CLIL is not sufficient.
University Initiative	The university initiative to introduce CLIL is not sufficient.
Curriculum	It is difficult to change the current curriculums for CLIL implementations.
Outcomes	Outcomes from implementations of CLIL.
Not Expected	Outcomes teachers do not expect from CLIL.
English Proficiency	CLIL will not improve students' English proficiency.
Content Knowledge	CLIL will not improve students' understanding of content knowledge.
Expected	Outcomes teachers expect from CLIL.
Content Knowledge	CLIL will improve students' understanding of content knowledge.
Cognitive Skills	CLIL will improve students' cognitive skills (i.e. high order thinking skills).
Teaching Skills	CLIL will improve lecturers' teaching skills.
English Proficiency	CLIL will improve students' English proficiency.

A Teacher Development Program for Primary English Teachers in Italy: A Blended Approach to Learning English and Language Teaching Methodology

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1. Introduction

Ever since English (or another foreign language) became a required component in the curriculum of primary education in Japan in 2011, preparing primary teachers for this new subject has been a major issue requiring immediate attention. Starting in 2014, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) announced the vigorous promotion of language teacher education, including that for newly certified primary English teachers as well as in-service primary teachers who were not initially trained to teach a foreign language (MEXT, 2013). With the prospect of English becoming mandated as a compulsory academic subject (rather than simply as *katsudo*, or activities focusing on oral language without the status of a formal subject) in Grades 5 and 6 in 2020, the preparation of primary English teachers has been in even greater demand along with the development of corresponding curriculum, materials, and assessment instruments. Inadequate preparation of teachers can lead to unequal access to effective English instruction resulting in greater educational disparities between different regions within a country (Chow, 2014).

Similar stipulations and shared concerns can be found in other countries today, especially in *Expanding Circle* countries (Kachru, 1990), where English is taught as an academic subject in school and for the majority, the practical use of English is typically limited to communication across national borders. As countries such as China, Taiwan, France, and Germany introduced English as part of their primary education curriculum in the 2000s, these nations (and others) are in need of quality teacher education to match teacher qualifications to demand for primary English education (Allen Tamai, 2013; Butler, 2015; Lopriore, 2015; Spolsky & Moon, 2012).

The motivation for the present investigation into Italian teacher education was a report of an online teacher development program entitled *PuntoEdu Lingue* designed for primary English teachers in Italy written by Nakamura (2011). In Italy, a foreign language was designated as a required subject by the government in 1991, 20 years ahead of Japan, even though it was not unilaterally enforced immediately across the nation. English became compulsory from the Grade 1 on in 2003, with the aim of achieving the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) A1 level by the fifth year of instruction (Nakamura, 2011). Nakamura's paper describes the shortage of qualified in-service English teachers in Italian primary schools and details an innovative online professional teacher development course, which we review in subsequent sections of the present paper. Ishihara's (2013) initial project inspired by Nakamura (2011) consisted of two phases: 1) 12.5 hours of class observations in three primary schools, a teacher survey, and an interview with an applied

linguist in the Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) in Rome in 2013, and 2) a teacher survey and interviews with MIUR officials as well as four teachers and teacher educators in the Veneto region (Venice-Mestre and Verona) in 2014. The data obtained in the second phase was reinforced by follow-up email correspondence with two of the teacher educators interviewed earlier as well as by the further collaboration with one of them, Richieri, the co-author of this paper.

Hereafter, we focus on phase 2 with regard to the hybrid primary teacher development course that formed part of this project (see Ishihara, 2013 for the informal report on the first phase and in particular the teaching of culture and pragmatics in primary schools in Rome). One shortcoming of Ishihara's data was that due to her limited contacts in Italy, relatively short visits to the country, novice proficiency in Italian, and slowly emerging cultural literacy, the amount and quality of the data gathered were far from adequate. However, thanks to the data accumulated by Richieri over her years of experience as a teacher educator for the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program under investigation, the present paper will be of interest to language teachers and teacher educators in Japan since the two countries share similar characteristics in terms of restricted domestic use of English and requirements to teach the language at primary level. What should be noted as a characteristic of the Italian system is that until the recent past, certified teachers of English taught only English without serving as homeroom teachers or teaching other subjects. Currently, these teachers are getting replaced by English teachers with a CEFR B1 certification who also teach other subjects and serve as homeroom teachers.

2. Overview of the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program

In this section, we present a brief profile of the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program based on Nakamura (2011) and supplement it with Richieri's insider perspective as well as Ishihara's observations. *PuntoEdu* is an online platform founded in 2002 in Italy and consisting of blended learning combining face-to-face instruction and an online training for primary and secondary teachers. *PuntoEdu Lingue* is one of the tracks focused on English language learning and teaching methodology training specifically designed for primary in-service teachers below CEFR B1 who became certified when this type of language teaching training was unavailable. The program has been implemented since 2004. Depending on the teachers' needs as well as organisational or financial matters, the course can be taken intensively or in a more extended manner spanning two or even three years. As reported by Nakamura (2011), the total of 5,000 in-service primary teachers without teacher training in college participated in this program by 2011. As of the year 2016, enrollment in this program is virtually elective and participant teachers take this course outside of their regular work hours unless there is a conflict with their school responsibilities. In such a case, teachers may be excused to attend *PuntoEdu Lingue* meetings and get exempt from school meetings or vice versa. Currently participants are not compensated for the time spent on this professional development.¹

The curriculum is composed of a Language Training component (340 hours) and a Methodology Training section (40 hours), totaling 380 hours of online learning and interaction.

¹ While there also are other professional development opportunities beyond the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program, they are optional. At present, no other formal opportunities are offered for developing language competence further.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the language learning component (in orange on the left side of the screenshot) progresses from lower to higher proficiency levels, aiming to reach the CEFR B1 level after the completion of all three modules. As can be seen in the items highlighted in orange, each module requires 100-140 hours of learning as part of the national curriculum, 40 devoted to online activities, and 60 to face-to-face sessions in Modules 1 and 2 and 80 online and 60 face-to-face in Module 3. However, in some regions of the country, a higher standard of 120-160 hours (highlighted in pink) is allocated in each of the three modules.



Figure 1. Curriculum components of the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program²

In the language training modules, teacher learners are required to attend face-to-face classes and work independently online. If they wish, they can also interact online with their peers and expert English teachers serving as tutors. The other component (in blue to the right of the screenshot) is teaching methodology, which requires CEFR A2 competence at the minimum.³ This component comprises 20 hours of face-to-face sessions as well as 20 hours of online activities for independent learning, in which teacher learners read online documents, engage in projects, and write lesson plans. In the process, they are required to interact in English with their peers and tutors online and share ideas and materials.

² All screenshots are reproduced with permission from INDIRE (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione, e Ricerca Educativa), Sezione Didattica e Formazione, Florence, Italy. INDIRE is an institute of the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research devoted to education, research, and innovation aiming to facilitate educational innovation and improvement in documentation, educational research, and in-service training for teachers and administrators, including the dissemination of effective instruction and new technologies (OECD, 2016).

³ Teacher learners individually take computerized placement tests at a university, which include writing, reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary as well as oral/aural communicative competence assessed through a conversation with the examiner.

Given this blended learning approach, the course is managed by both a course director and tutors. The tutors, who come in direct contact with 20-30 teacher learners, manage face-to-face sessions, coordinate their virtual classrooms and maintain records of the activities.⁴ Once signed up for the program, the teacher learners can access their learning group (*Il mio gruppo*), their portfolio, and various other larger communities of teachers as well as INDIRE (see the icons in the upper section of Figure 2). Since Nakamura (2011) includes the overview of the methodology component (see the section 3.2 below), in this paper we focus on illustrating actual activities used in the program both in the language learning and methodology components.

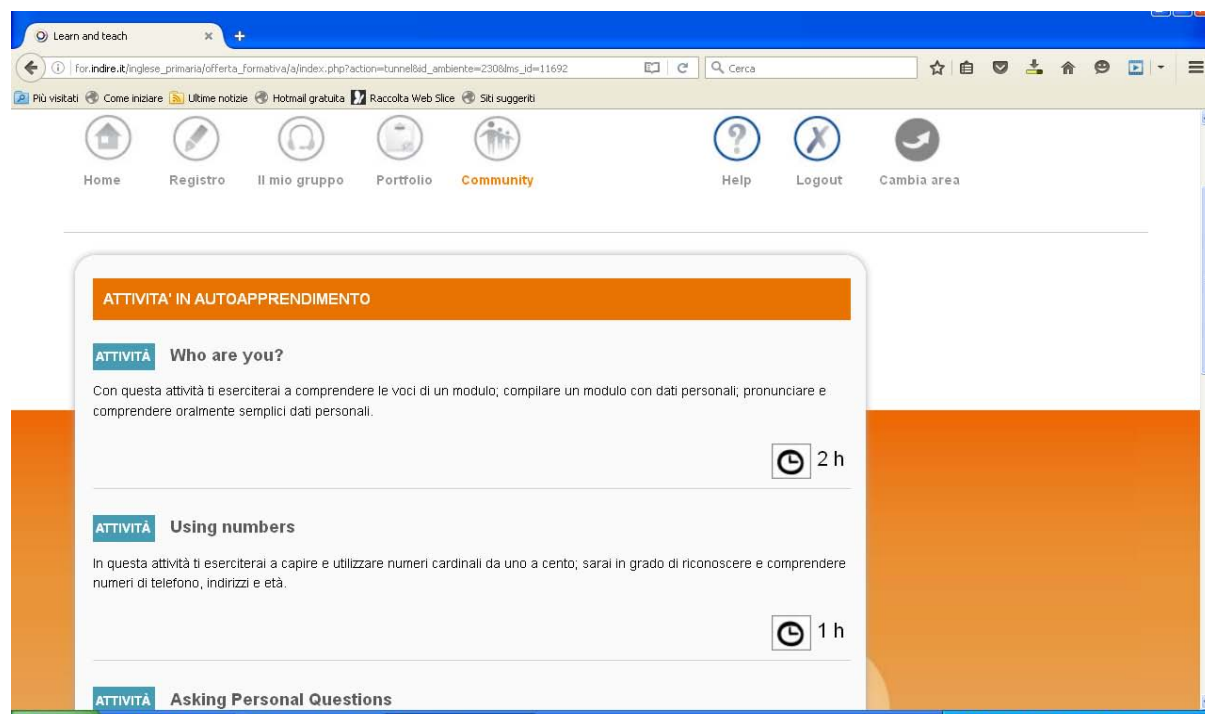


Figure 2. Self-learning activities in the language learning component

Figure 2 also shows the introduction to two self-learning activities from Module 1. Each one has a suggested time allocation of one or two hours. The titles of the activities⁵ are followed by short descriptions of the expected learning outcomes. When teacher learners access the activities, they find a mapping of these resources as well as pages devoted to language practice, vocabulary, pronunciation, and initial self-assessment. While doing practice on these language areas, three icons appear at the top of the page which lead to 1) additional educational yet entertaining materials, 2) a structured self-assessment tool, and 3) useful websites.

⁴ Tutors were recruited on the basis of their qualifications (basically, a university degree in English). In addition, other qualifications could be considered, such as the minimum of CEFR C1 certificate in English, PhD or Master's degree, teaching experience, and familiarity with distance learning/teaching. Native speakers of English with a university degree were also recruited.

⁵ In the first *Who are you?* activity, the teacher learners study how to fill out a form with one's own data and to ask for and give simple personal data. The learning outcomes of the second activity, *Using numbers*, include understanding and using cardinal numbers from 1 to 100, telephone numbers, street address, and age.

3. Sample activities and resources

In this section, we present three examples of resources that were made available to us for online publication. The first is taken from the language learning component, the second from the methodological section, and the third from an additional online resource that provides interactive games.

3.1 Language learning component: Greetings

The purpose of this language learning component totaling the minimum of 340 hours of instruction is to improve in-service teachers' English proficiency. Teachers learn English grammar and vocabulary and develop language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) both in face-to-face class meetings and online. Online materials were designed in such a way as to include basic grammar clarifications, vocabulary input, and activities aiming to foster self-directed learning.

While working on one of the first online lessons in Module 1 (*Hello, what's your name?*), teacher learners are also introduced to formal and informal expressions of greeting and leave-taking. As illustrated in Figure 3, in the *Step in* phase (which includes three activities, as the three numbers in the top right corner show), teacher learners are asked to distinguish between the two functions of greetings they learnt in the previous *Warm Up* phase by choosing one of the two options (*Departing or Arriving?*) in the frame on the right side of the page. After a choice is made, they can check their answers against the solutions given. In this activity, teacher learners are exposed to a range of expressions that vary in their level of formality.

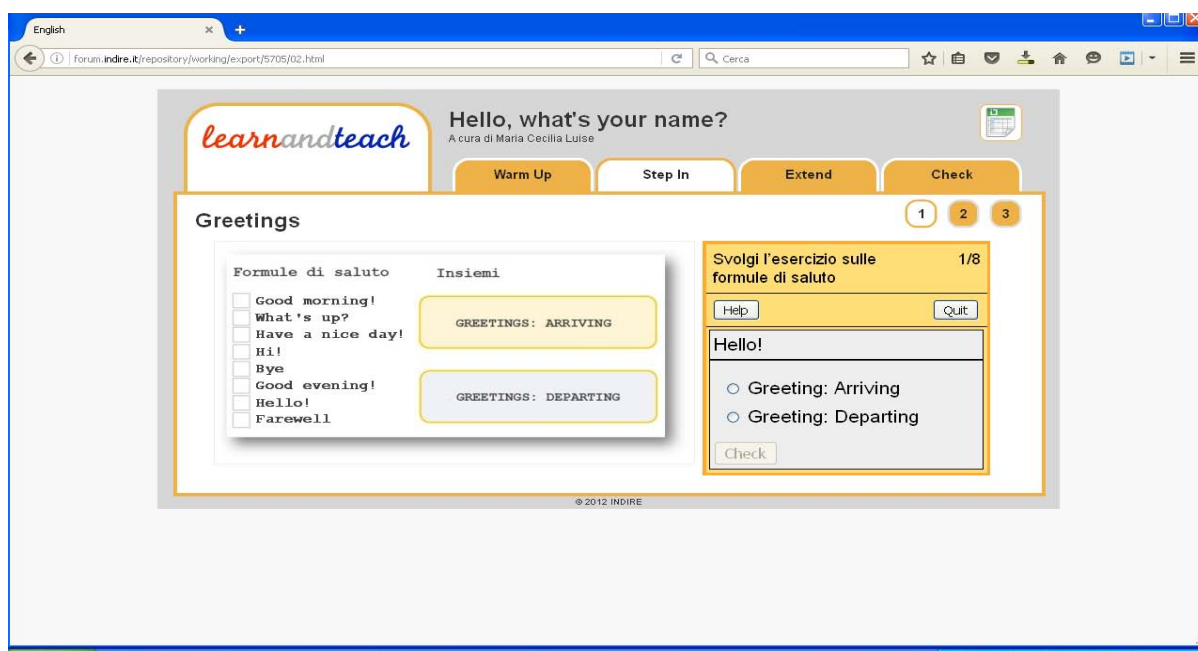


Figure 3. Sample activity: *Hello, what's your name?*

In the following phase, *Extend*, the teacher learners are invited to watch a short videoclip, the task being to understand how people greet each other and introduce themselves. They hear some of the expressions presented in the previous *Warm up* and *Step in* phases (e.g. *Hello, Hi, Pleased to meet you, How do you do, Good to see you guys, My name's ...*), which

may lead to reflections to be developed in a face-to-face session on pragmatics-related aspects of communication (e.g., levels of formality for these expressions and contexts in which they are used). If they wish, they can watch the scene again with subtitles. Then, they are asked to listen to a few short conversations and fill in the missing words in order to complete the exchanges.

The teacher learners are also responsible for their proficiency development by independently joining interactive activities online. For this purpose, apart from offering the possibility of collaborating online with members of one's own group, the website also includes resource-rich links to other English teaching materials and multiple teacher communities. At the end of the course, the teachers must take an external standardised exit test to be certified as having reached the CEFR B1 level.

3.2 Methodology component: Narrative instruction

In the language teaching methodology component of the curriculum, five nuclei can be found,⁶ each of which comprises multiple themes from which the in-service teachers can choose for a variable number of credits. The 2013 curriculum, which is still effective as of 2016, consists of five nuclei: 1) acquisition and learning, 2) language and culture, 3) lesson planning and assessment, 4) foreign language didactics, and 5) technology and resources. See Nakamura (2011) for the breakdown of the nuclei from the 2007-8 curricula and illustration of some of the themes as well as her assessment of the program for possible application to Japanese contexts; see the Appendix 1 of this paper for the full list of themes under the five nuclei in the 2013 curriculum. For example, a sample activity showcased in Nakamura (2011, p. 57) requires teacher learners to read online resources provided for the topic in question and apply that knowledge in designing an instructional plan. In another example, Figure 4 shows the front page of one of the activities taken from the unit *Language and Culture*, which aims to develop intercultural competence through storytelling.

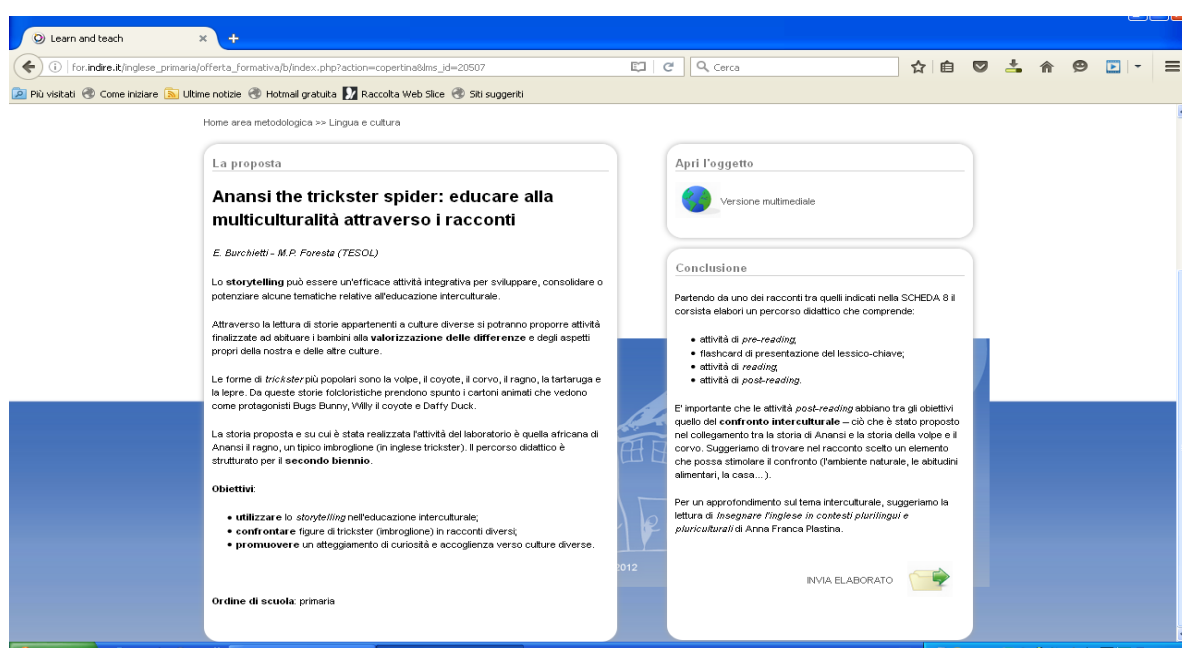


Figure 4. Sample activity: *Storytelling*

⁶ See Appendix for the five nuclei and themes included in the language teaching methodology component.

In this activity, the teachers are asked to consider the character of the trickster as treated around the world. The aim is to awaken the children's curiosity and openness toward stories from other cultures and to acquaint them with the value of diversity. By clicking on *Versione multimediale* (online version), the teacher learners are presented with the learning outcomes, the description of the activity, and the materials to be used (e.g., flash cards, maps, etc.) in pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities along with related bibliographies and relevant websites. In the final phase of the activity, the teacher learners are to design a similar instructional plan using one of the stories and the instructions provided. The lessons developed by the teachers are supposed to include the steps mentioned above, with the same educational aim of intercultural understanding.

By clicking on *Invia Elaborato* (Send your project) at the bottom of the page, the teachers' lesson is sent to the online platform in order to be assessed by the tutor. It is noteworthy that although the instructional plans are pursued individually, the teachers are required to discuss any problems with peers and exchange suggestions prior to final submission.

3.3 Additional online resources: A ludic approach

In addition to the Language and Methodology modules, the online course also provides additional resources in *Area Bambini* (Children's Space) dedicated to interactive ludic activities (see Figure 5) concerning themes related to children's experiences, which exploit computer applications to their full potential.

The ludic approach is based on the belief that games lower anxiety (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), add interest to what students do (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005; Harmer, 2004, 2015), provide a context for meaningful communication (Ko, 2014), and promote intergroup competition (Dörnyei, 2014). Moreover, ICT (Information and Communications Technology), computers included, has the power to draw children's attention and can be applied effectively to devising appropriate activities for specific individual needs.

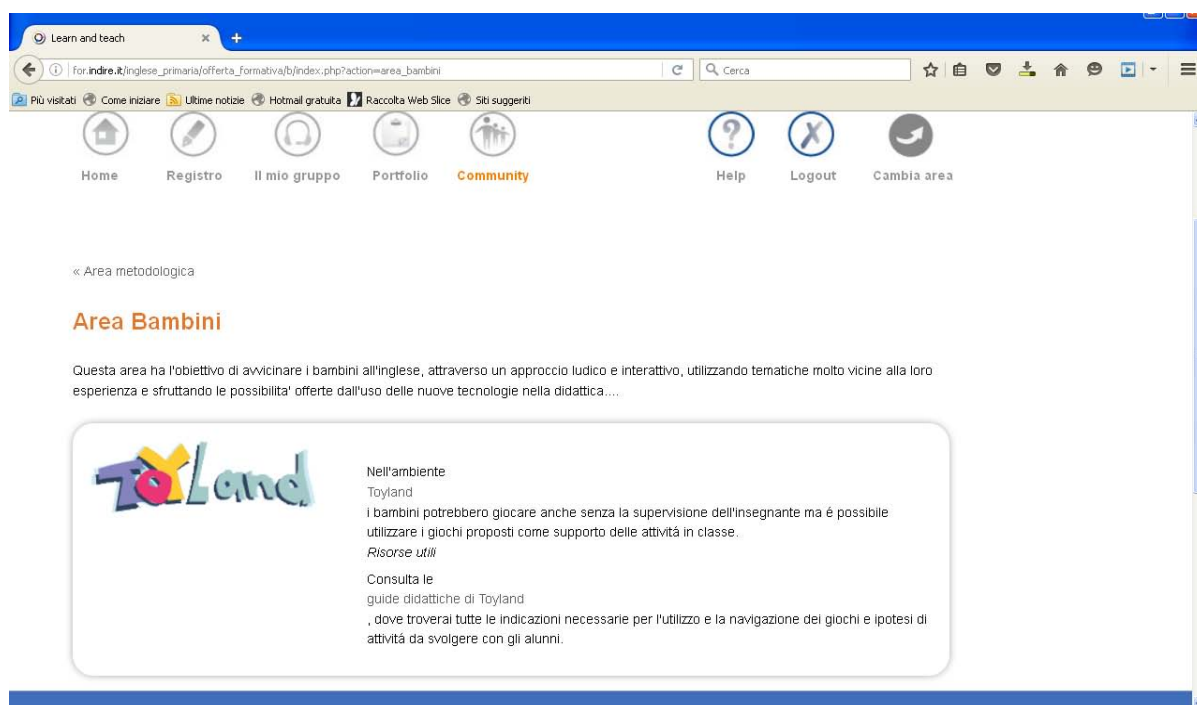


Figure 5. *Toyland*

Area Bambini includes the link to *Toyland* and to the teacher's guide. While in *Toyland*, the children can play without any supervision, or they can play the games provided during classroom activities to reinforce their learning. They can enter several areas (e.g. the Magic Castle, the Puppet Theatre, the Music Book, the Arcade) after choosing a level of difficulty. The games include *Spot the Differences*, *Drag and Drop*, and *English Memory*. They can also read "living books" by choosing the desired option (e.g., with or without subtitles, with or without a story-telling voice).

The teacher's guide consists of two sections, which contain instructional information and class activities, respectively. In the first section, instructions are given for the appropriate and beneficial use of the tool along with general pedagogical aims and specific language goals, while in the second, the teachers can find activities to conduct in class, the ICT lab, or the gym.

4. The role of the tutor

As mentioned earlier, the tutor is an expert teacher of English recruited through a public announcement, who plays a central role in the development of the program of which he or she is in charge. The responsibilities include:

- Integrating face-to-face sessions with online materials;
- Developing the primary syllabus as described in *Quale profilo e quali competenze per l'inglese del docente di scuola primaria*⁷ (Which profile and which competences for the primary school teacher's English?), which includes not only language functions,

⁷ This volume was published by the Ministry of Public Education (now called MIUR) in 2007 and was written by a panel of experts.

vocabulary, and grammar but also examples of specific classroom expressions⁸ with which to implement activities in class and to talk about methodology with peers;

- Checking teacher learners' attendance (with a maximum of 25% excused absence per module);
- Helping teachers facing technical problems with online resources;
- Promoting a sense of belonging and mutual assistance;
- Monitoring teachers' progress online;
- Facilitating in-service teachers' communicative competence;
- Validating teachers' achievement tests (composed of two parts: one focused on reading and writing to be completed online or in class, the other checking oral/aural skills in a face-to face session).

Due to space limitations, we will not elaborate on all the responsibilities listed above. Instead, we will focus on three of them that are closely inter-related and overlap with each other: integration of face-to-face sessions with online materials, the promotion of a sense of belonging and mutual assistance within the group, and facilitating in-service teachers' communicative competence as we believe that these require the tutors' specific attention.

4.1 Integrating face-to-face sessions with online materials

It is the tutor's responsibility to promote in face-to-face sessions the teachers' use of the knowledge and skills they begin to develop through the online program. For example, it is up to the tutor to decide whether or not to adopt a language course book. If in fact a course book is adopted, the tutor must bear in mind that most materials on the market address a generic learner. For instance, specific vocabulary to use with children while communicating in a narrative or procedural context along with language peculiar to particular genres (e.g., rhymes and songs) is not usually included in course books that address adult learners. Consequently, whenever possible, the tutor must promote the adjustments to be made to the language in the course book to the familiar context of the class in order to allow the teacher learners to develop the specific communicative competence they need to carry out activities suitable for their students in class.

4.2 Promoting a sense of belonging and mutual assistance

Thanks to its blended forms of interaction, the program encourages the creation of a learning community in which shared practices generate value because they offer a springboard for further insights and elaborations all teacher learners develop in collaboration. As regards the virtual space, the tutor can make use of synchronous or asynchronous communication to support online interactions among the group by means of:

- Shared materials (for downloads without time or place constraints);
- Chat (for real-time exchanges of text messages);
- Blog Wiki (which allows messages and comments. In addition, teachers can modify each

⁸ See p. 78 for basic classroom language. Retrieved from: http://for.indire.it/inglese_primaria/Docente-Inglese-def.pdfhttp://for.indire.it/inglese_primaria/Docente-Inglese-def.pdfhttp://for.indire.it/inglese_primaria/Docente-Inglese-def.pdf.

other's texts if they are posted in the wiki area, an option that can be highly valuable if collaborative writing is to be pursued);

- Synchronous Lab (which allows the tutor to organise distance meetings by using a video-conferencing application).

Moreover, teachers have access to the *Community* and *Forum* options, two areas dedicated to socialisation, discussion, and debate between all the teachers taking part in the program. Although none of the interactions occurring in these virtual spaces earn the participants any learning credits, they facilitate the development of: (1) a sense of membership in this close-knit teacher and tutor community; (2) the awareness of one's individual role in each other's professional growth; (3) a sense of satisfaction for all participants; and (4) a kind of emotional relationship based on shared interactive experiences (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). These features are representative of an effective learning community and are therefore crucial to the success of the program. Consequently, the tutor plays a pivotal role in promoting and fostering online interactions.

The tutor can also support online communication, both synchronously (via chat and synchronous labs) and asynchronously (via posts and blog wiki), by eliciting opinions and views when participation is low, promoting positive interdependence, encouraging peer feedback, attending to relationships between the teacher learners, setting common goals, and sustaining self-esteem through group recognition of each member's achievements. It can also be helpful to have the teacher learners note how influential reciprocity may be in one's own professional growth. This can be done by focusing their attention on the many ways in which reciprocity and its positive effects can be manifested in learning contexts (Richieri, 2010). It is an important component of professional identity construction to make a transformation from "seeing oneself as a self-contained independent individual to seeing oneself as a member of a community of practice" (Richards, 2012, p. 53).

4.3 Facilitating in-service teachers' communicative competence

It is necessary for the tutor to ensure that the teacher learners practice communication skills as much as possible. In fact, the questionnaires administered at the end of the course over the last few years indicated that meaningful oral communication is the area the teachers perceived as their weakest and the most challenging of all the language skills (see Table 1 in Appendix 2).

The amount of time for face-to-face sessions in the language modules is rather limited (60 hours per module). Due to this constraint, the tutor might prioritise presentations of vocabulary and grammar at the expense of fostering oral/aural skills. In order to tackle this problem, Richieri implemented a number of solutions in her recent organizations of the program with the specific aims of creating further opportunities for oral interactions and promoting and sustaining motivation, an initiative we showcase below.

4.3.1 Promoting autonomous interactions via Skype

In Richieri's sessions, the teachers were invited to use Skype at home and have speaking sessions with a partner teacher. They were encouraged to have one conversation per week and to note the chosen topics, conversation times, and reflections in their diaries. For example, some of them discussed their daily activities, others introduced the film they had watched the evening before, and others still decided to revise what they had done in their previous class presentations. Those who took on this new challenge (which went beyond the course book and the online materials), seemed to develop autonomous learning strategies, namely the revision of language structures or the search for new vocabulary to have at their disposal during the conversations.

Moreover, these interactions developed over Skype may have enhanced the teacher learners' awareness of their own weaknesses and strengths. In fact, whereas in face-to-face sessions they were all exposed to new language items, only the faster or more proficient teacher learners could use them during their conversations on Skype. By comparing their own performance with their partner's in a safe environment, the less proficient learners could realise that they needed more time and practice. Additionally, some of the teacher learners were satisfied with the activity not only because they were able to perceive their fluency developing but also because their commitment was greatly appreciated by their family, who often witnessed their performance on Skype at home.

In brief, the learners' self-esteem and self-confidence are dimensions that should be of real concern for the tutors. The use of appropriate techniques can actively maintain motivation (Dörnyei, 2007), and encouraging retrospective self-evaluation (Dörnyei, 2007) through the use of logs and diaries can promote effort attributions, that is, the perceptions that one's achievements depend on their effort and thus is a controllable variable.

4.3.2 Contemporary art as a prompt for conversation

This section describes a face-to-face extra-curricular activity organised by Richieri in an attempt to further support teacher motivation in the learning community. This consisted of a visit to a nearby museum, the *Pinault Collection* housed in Venice's old Customs building, the *Dogana da Mar*. This museum was chosen both for its engagement in educational programs and for the specific kinds of artworks displayed. In fact, being far removed from conventional forms of expression, the artworks offered excellent opportunities for the teachers to speculate about their meaning and message. The visit, which took place in May 2012, was joined by about 50% of the teacher learners, while the rest were unable to take part due to institutional engagements. An English-speaking guide interacted with the group of teachers, who were asked to make use of a worksheet containing specific vocabulary and language functions aimed at expressing personal ideas and likes and dislikes as well as useful expressions for describing a work of art, negotiating meaning, and asking for more information. The interaction with the English-speaking guide urged the teachers to make use of English in a real context.

Although the visit was not included in the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program, it was implemented as enjoyable community building at the end of Module 2. The responses to the questionnaire administered to the participants indicated that this activity produced positive effects in a number of areas:

- A sense of belonging (they enjoyed taking part in the experience with their peers and tutor in a memorable location while also sharing some leisure time together);
- Self-assessment (they could test their communicative skills in a real-life context with their guide, peers, and tutor);
- Awareness of the relevance of the context in learning conditions both for themselves and their students, as two participants commented:
 - *[I appreciated the experience because] it was the first time that I found myself forced to understand and speak in English directly “on the field”. I felt like a real tourist. [...] I forced myself to think in English.*⁹
 - *[The experience] taught me that it is important to exercise the communication in contexts of real type, where each child can have fun in really experience communication in English. I might, for example, propose to my students to entertain the simple communication activities with e-mail or Skype with pupils of an English primary school.*¹⁰
- Self-confidence in relation to language competence (40% reported that the experience affected their confidence in English very much; 40% quite a lot; 20% a little) as well as learning skills in general (40% reported that the experience affected their confidence in their learning skills very much, 60% quite a lot).

The post-event survey also suggested that a larger number of similar projects should be carried out as part of the developing program and that these projects should therefore require specific pre-and-post learning activities.

Thus far, we described both the language learning and teaching methodology components of the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program by illustrating several components of the online program. We also portrayed the role played by tutors in teacher learning by introducing examples of the interactions Richieri introduced as a tutor to facilitate both online and face-to-face learning. We trust that readers have gained a sense of how this teacher development program is structured, how it can be adapted to suit teachers' and tutors' inclinations, and how it can create and nurture teachers' growth as members of learning communities of primary English teachers in Italy, and by extension in comparable EFL contexts including Japan.

5. Discussion

The view of language learning and language teaching underlying this hybrid program is in line with a sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, as we saw in the activity featured in Figure 3, which employs a storytelling approach, language learning is mediated by the dialogic use of language itself, which in this case also scaffolds learners' understanding of intercultural diversity. This dialogic way of knowing also applies to the

⁹ Quoted verbatim from a participant's response to the survey question: *Why did you like/not like the trip to Punta della Dogana in Venice?*

¹⁰ Quoted verbatim from a participant's response to the survey question: *Did the experience teach you anything you can do with your pupils?*

inquiry-based mode of teacher learning facilitated by the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program. This electronic platform is employed not merely as a means of transferring knowledge but as mediation for knowledge construction by teachers themselves. Teacher learning is characterised as a socially mediated activity in which appropriation by teachers is assisted through dialogic interactions (Johnson, 2009) between teachers and tutors, both virtually online and through face-to-face sessions.

Although teachers can form a collegial community through online interactions alone (see Kulavuz-Onal & Vásquez, 2013; Palloff & Pratt, 2007), an advantage of the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program resides in its blended form of interactions, which relies on personable attributes of human relationships as well as ease of communication despite physical remoteness and time constraints in participant teachers' lives. In this way, teachers' voices can be constructed, nurtured, negotiated, and empowered in this community of in-service teachers in which teachers feel safe about interacting openly and exercising agency. Furthermore, through electronic links to external resources, the program takes advantage of contemporary technology to invite teacher learners to position themselves in much larger communities of collaborating teachers (Breen, 2006). In fact, Nakamura (2011) notes that in response to the needs of teachers who underwent this certification, the program was re-designed to continue to offer opportunities for further autonomous learning through interactions with others beyond the completion of the allotted hours. While enrolling in the program, teacher learners appear to have been socialised into a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and wished to maintain this affiliation beyond formal certification. As research shows, in blended learning, the sense of community can be stronger than on a course conducted exclusively online due to a reduced sense of isolation (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Given these features of the program, which are in alignment with the view of learning as socially constructed, dynamic, and spanning both immediate and broader teacher communities, we characterise the dialogic interactions and the community of practice facilitated by the hybrid platform as an effective model of lifelong learning (Sato, 2013) that teacher education in Japan can emulate.

Another consideration teacher development in Japan may be increasingly compelled to deal with in this globalised world is how to understand and situate linguistic varieties of World Englishes as well as competing conceptual and pedagogical ideologies not only sociolinguistically but also in the realm of language teaching. While in some countries, the dominant discourse of English learning and teaching may be one in which *Inner Circle* language norms prevail, other countries especially in postcolonial nations, are more resistant to being required to abide by norms they see as irrelevant in light of their local language practices and needs (Canagarajah, 2013; Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman 2008). This non-conformist stance calling for the need to teach localised varieties of English has been challenged as a result of a shortage of materials and assessment tools needed, limited teacher proficiency, and inadequate professional development (Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman 2008). However, given that there is a growing need for interactions in English with World Englishes speakers as well as *Inner Circle* speakers in both Italy and Japan, exposure to and awareness of such varieties will be an increasingly important consideration for English education in Japan (Butler, 2007). In addition, a methodological approach featuring Communicative Language Teaching derived from the Western context may present a challenge across different instructional contexts in Japan as this approach may be incompatible with local cultural and educational traditions unless it is

refashioned to suit the local context (Butler, 2011; Hu & McKay, 2012). Although these issues are not often tackled in depth in many language teacher education programs including *PuntoEdu Lingue*, teacher development in Japan will need to address this complexity, which has the potential to profoundly affect future language teaching practices.

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Appendix 1: Nuclei and Themes in the Language Teaching Methodology Component (2013 curriculum still in effect as of 2016)

ACQUISIZIONE E APPRENDIMENTO (Acquisition and learning)

- Acquisizione-apprendimento (Acquisition and learning)
- Processi apprendimento precoce (Early learning processes)
- Interlingua e analisi dell'errore (Interlingua and error analysis)
- Strategie di correzione (Correction strategies)
- Componenti affettivo-motivazionali, sociali, cognitive, e metacognitive in una prospettiva costruttivista (Affective-motivational, social, cognitive, and meta-cognitive components from a constructivist perspective)
- Stili di apprendimento e differenziazione dell'apprendimento (Learning styles and teaching differentiation)

LINGUA E CULTURA (Language and culture)

- Rapporto lingua/cultura e dimensione interculturale (Language-culture relationship and the intercultural dimension)
- La competenza plurilingue e pluriculturale (Multilingual and multicultural competence)

PROGETTAZIONE DIDATTICA E VERIFICA (Lesson planning and assessment)

- Progettazione di un curriculum di LS [lingua straniera], di un syllabo e di unità didattiche o di apprendimento (Planning foreign language learning paths: curriculum, syllabus, and lessons)
- Verifica degli apprendimenti e diverse forme di monitoraggio e valutazione (Testing and forms of monitoring and assessment)

DIDATTICA LINGUE (Foreign language didactics)

- Metodi e approcci in glottodidattica e scelte metodologiche (Language teaching methods and approaches and methodological choices)
- L'approccio comunicativo (The communicative approach)
- Sviluppo delle abilità linguistiche (Skills development)

TECNOLOGIE E MATERIALI (Technology and resources)

- Sussidi didattici e nuove tecnologie (Teaching aids and ICT)
- Analisi e costruzione di materiali didattici (Evaluation and creation of teaching materials)
- Conoscere le basi per l'uso della LIM [lavagna interattiva multimediale] in classe (Basic knowledge of IWB [interactive whiteboard] use in the classroom)

Appendix 2: Language areas perceived by teacher learners as difficult to develop through the *PuntoEdu Lingue* program (multiple answers applied)

Group level 0-A1 (May 2014) (17 respondents out of 19)	vocabulary	2
	speaking	15
	listening	11
	pronunciation	9
	writing	0
	reading	0
Group level A2-B1 (February 2014) (15 respondents out of 15)	vocabulary	3
	speaking	8
	listening	10
	pronunciation	6
	writing	1
	reading	0
Group level A1-A2 (May 2012) (14 respondents out of 16)	vocabulary	0
	speaking	7
	listening	12
	pronunciation	4
	writing	1
	reading	0

Peer-Review Policy

- 1 All submissions are peer reviewed for the following purposes.
 - To enhance the academic and educational value of the study
 - To reduce bias and error
 - To ensure the accuracy of the information
- 2 Submissions should be made primarily by researchers who have given presentations at SIG conferences. Each submission is evaluated by two reviewers selected from among the SIG members. The reviewers make one of the following recommendations to the editorial board.
 - A Accept
 - B Accept after revision
 - C Do not accept (Peer-review after revision)

In the event that the reviewers' evaluations differ, the editorial board members make a final decision.

Editor's note:

As always, it was truly an enlightening experience to put together the articles contributed to this volume. While language education doesn't work without vision and grand designs, students' learning depends much on the details of their teachers' decision-making in the social milieu. I hope the insights provided by the authors will help us find solutions to integrate our vision and educational practices in ways that would best enhance our students' quality of life.

(Y. Ehara)

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