

Exploration of teaching and construction of teacher identity through teaching practicum: A case study of a pre-service Japanese EFL teacher

Yutaka Fujieda

Introduction

A body of research in the area of teacher education over the past years has put an emphasis on the process-product view, in which teaching is regarded as the exercise of specific ways of acting. Such criticism of the process-product model reflects the recognition that teaching entails both action and the thinking that underlies it (Shulman, 1986). Thus, the research trend of teacher education explores teachers' processes of teaching through self-awareness called "teacher learning" rather than discrete techniques or skills in classrooms (Freeman, 1989; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Nagamine, 2008).

In other words, research focus in teacher education or development has undergone a shift from searching for better ways to train teachers to trying to describe and understand the process of how teachers learn to teach through their reflection (Burns & Richards, 2009; Fanselow, 1988; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Jacobs & Farrell, 2001; Johnson, 2009; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Due to the research shift in the field of teacher education, several studies of teacher development highlighting pre-service and in-service teachers' self-awareness or descriptions of the real teaching experiences in classrooms have been undertaken. Nonetheless, such analyses of teacher development by Japanese EFL teachers, especially pre-service teachers, are yet to be fully examined (see Nagamine, 2008).

The present inquiry examines teaching exploration analysis by a Japanese EFL pre-service teacher during a teaching practicum. This investigation primarily emphasizes how the pre-service teacher explores his teaching of English classes and examines the pre-service teacher's construction of teacher identity as an English teacher.

To explore the Japanese EFL pre-service teacher's teaching and his teacher beliefs, the primary goal of this study is to describe a Japanese EFL pre-service teaching exploration and construction of teacher identity based on his reflective accounts of an actual teaching practicum in a high school for two weeks to promote a clearer

understanding of the practical teaching, his teaching beliefs, values, and professional growth as an English teacher.

1. Previous Research on Teacher Development

Previous studies in the area of teacher development were inclined to find considerable better ways to train teachers or apply them to classrooms. However, present focus on teacher education has significantly shifted to trying to describe and understand the pre-/in-service teachers' processes of teaching through their self-awareness or reflection. Gebhard & Oprandy (1999) expand the Developmental Approach to teacher education and development, proposing an Exploratory Approach to go beyond the prescriptive manner of finding a "correct" or "better" way of teaching. The goals of the Developmental Approach put more emphasis on finding various effective ways of teaching, whereas the key element of the Exploratory Approach tries to simply recognize teachers' beliefs, principles, and practices.

In a similar vein, a non-judgmental stance by teachers in observing their own teaching as well as others' would offer them more possibilities to explore. Teachers can reflect on how teaching should be done in the name of the "helpful prescriptions" of others (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999, p.183). According to Gebhard (2006) and Gebhard & Oprandy (1999), ways of being aware of our teaching can be expanded when we do more than the usual ways of understanding teaching, that is, the processes of problem solving as we first identify a problematic part in our teaching and reinvent ways to manage it. Although such problem solving processes can involve much of our reflective awareness, there are many other potential ways of exploring our teaching. As an illustration, we can see what happens by "trying the opposite" (Fanselow, 1992) or random teaching behaviors, considering our beliefs or assumptions that underlie what we do or how we feel about what we do in relation to what we value as a teacher, a learner, or even a person (Donaghue, 2003). In order to make the most out of such a reflective or awareness raising process, it is necessary for us to keep our mind open to any unexpected discoveries that may arise before, after and during the process (Richards, 1990).

2. Exploratory Teaching in Classrooms

Gebhard (2005, 2006, 2009) stresses an exploratory approach to teacher development to see our teaching differently. The general principle for this approach is not to find out the problems of teaching but to see what happens with various potential ideas of teaching. As Fanselow (1988) notes by referring to Bronowski's (1956)

comments on how we construct knowledge, the process of exploration is the “habit of truth”, always questioning “Is this so?” (p. 197).

Moreover, Fanselow (1988) emphasizes that teachers need to make small changes and incorporate them to actual teaching. The changes will be more creative and practical to present a different way of teaching or classroom management as well as do the opposite, as Fanselow (1992) puts it, “Try the opposite.” For instance, teachers try to correct students’ errors of grammar or pronunciation to facilitate students’ language development. Instead of correcting mistakes, we can try to give alternative feedback such as positive and negative feedback or we can stop error corrections. As for another example, teachers often praise their students, saying “Good,” or “Excellent” to motivate the learners’ intensions. Then, what happens if we look at what happens when we praise less or stop praising in the classrooms? Furthermore, we can change our movement patterns in the classroom, changing the walking patterns or keeping standing up in front. While students are doing group work, we can move around more frequently or less frequently to see what might happen.

Such an exploratory approach provides teachers with chances to “construct, reconstruct, and revise” their teaching (Fanselow, 1988, p. 116) and aims to develop teaching based on teacher’s own beliefs as a research issue of teacher education and development (Richards, 1988). This reflective approach allows teachers to consider how they interpret their own instructions in class and improve their teaching, highlighting the idea of “how I should teach” rather than “what the best way of teaching is” as Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) mention “there is little evidence that any one way of teaching is better than another in all settings” (p. 7).

3. Research on Exploratory Teaching

Although inquiries into exploring teaching based on teachers’ beliefs have been conducted in ESL settings, approaches to exploratory teaching seem to be downplayed, especially in Japanese EFL contexts. While current English education in Japanese secondary/higher education has raised the stakes of teacher development, the basic concept of teacher development still lies in seeking better techniques to teach or to solve the problems of teaching. Such viewpoints in the field of teacher education are considered “teacher training” rather than teacher development. Thus, teacher development in Japanese EFL settings needs to reinforce the perception that pre-/in-service teachers need to further explore their own teaching approaches underlying their teaching beliefs and re/construct their teacher identity (see Nagamine, 2007, 2008).

The present study examines the teaching exploration carried out by a Japanese EFL pre-service teacher during a teaching practicum. This investigation primarily emphasizes how the pre-service teacher explores his teaching in the English classes he teaches and how he attempts to construct his teacher identity as an English teacher.

3-1. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how one Japanese EFL pre-service teacher explores his teaching in classrooms during his teaching practicum in high school as well as the construction of his teacher identity. This inquiry utilizes a qualitative methodology (a case study) reflecting the research subject's reflective accounts and voices from actual teaching experiences.

Since the principal goal of this study is to delve into a Japanese EFL learner's teaching exploration as well as a (re)construction of teacher identity, the research participant's actual teaching training experiences in narrative are conducted as prime data sources since narrative inquiries have flourished in various fields of language teaching and applied linguistics (Bailey & Nunan, 1996; Casanave & Schecter, 1997; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Tsui, 2007). Even so, as much of the prior research on teacher education neglected the voices of teachers and students, the use of narrative plays a significant role to share a belief and exhibit the processes as well as experiences of teaching and learning (see Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Composing a story encourages teachers to comprehend the affective dimensions (i.e. struggles or success) of teachers' lives, experiences, and phenomena through practical experiences and to reexamine teaching beliefs, philosophy, and professional growth (e.g. Casanave & Schecter, 1997; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Richie & Wilson, 2000). Furthermore, exhibiting the self-reflective accounts of teaching provides a glimpse into a teacher's affective management (conflicts or dilemmas), success, or development by reinventing teaching per se.

Therefore, the use of narrative contributes greatly to exploring teaching and establishing identity; as Johnson and Golombek (2002) echo, stories in narrative "bring new meaning and significance to the work of teachers within their own professional landscapes" (p. 3).

3-2. Procedure

The author-researcher asked the research subject, Shinji (pseudonym), to write his own teaching beliefs and philosophy before the subject started the two-week teaching practicum¹ in a local high school from June 1st through June 12th in 2009. During the

training, Shinji also had to keep a daily journal on his reflections, daily activities, and teaching experience as a session report for the teaching practicum. After completing the training, Shinji produced his own teaching experiences in narrative written in Japanese, describing how he tried to teach in classes and reexamining his teaching as well as teacher beliefs and philosophy. Furthermore, the author-researcher conducted interviews with Shinji twice in the researcher's office. Then, the author-researcher collected the teaching practicum journal and narratives, transcribed the interviews, and carefully analyzed them to investigate the research questions.

3-3. Background of the Research Participant

Shinji is a senior majoring in English at Maebashi Kyoai Gakuen College. He is competitive, highly motivated towards learning English, and has high-level literacy skills. According to Shinji, he first wanted to be an English teacher when he was a high school student because his English teacher was very enthusiastic and employed interesting approaches to English instruction. Struck by the English teacher's own approaches, Shinji decided to be an English teacher at the high school level. As he has tried to be an English teacher, he independently studied English as well as educational issues by reading books and taking various teaching-curriculum classes.

When Shinji entered college, he began to work part-time as a private tutor, teaching English to secondary level students. This is because he believes that it is necessary to practice teaching outside classrooms so that pre-service teachers can have an opportunity to examine their own teaching approach directly.

4. Results

4-1. Explorations of Shinji's teaching

When his teaching practicum started, Shinji struggled to produce his own teaching activities (i.e. what he should do to make students active in the classroom). Since Shinji's teaching belief is that English classes should have a sense of fun, he aimed to provide students with speaking activities such as reading the textbook aloud or asking questions of each other in the classroom. Moreover, Shinji said he would like to expand the use of more participatory approaches (i.e., using English in class, offering communicative role-play games, or talking with peers) because he had hoped to receive such types of English classes when he was in senior high school.

Following his beliefs of teaching, he brainstormed various classrooms activities and just carried them out. The students seemed to be unresponsive to his teaching approach, but he considered more dynamic interactions among students in classroom as

a primary goal. For this reason, he described the following in the interview:

On the first day of teaching practicum, I found that students had few chances to speak English. After observing a reading class, I really thought that I wanted students to have a chance to speak English. So, what I thought that I should do first was to break the ice. Even if students looked bewildered by my teaching approach, I needed to keep going with my speaking plans.

During his teaching practice, Shinji was able to actively pursue task improvement in his classes. He was mainly in charge of a class, “English I,” which emphasized reading comprehension for 2nd year students. Despite the reading-related class, he mentioned he managed to offer a “comfortable” atmosphere in class, asking questions and giving instructions to students in plain English. Moreover, he incorporated some group work into tasks so that all students could have a chance to lead to an answer to the activity by interacting with peers. To bring about a change in the teaching/learning style, Shinji reflected on his teaching approaches, reviewing his “practical teaching note” provided by the college which kept daily. Looking back on the reflective descriptions to make up for what it was missing in the classes, he considered some potential ideas for classroom activities.

The reason for accelerating changes to his classroom activities stemmed from observations of other English teachers in high schools and from his teacher beliefs. During the practicum, Shinji had to observe the teaching of some English teachers. While observing the classes, he strongly felt the necessity for changes as well as new tasks in his lessons every time he had to teach. Even though observations of teaching furnished Shinji with useful information, he often thought that classroom tasks seemed to settle into a rut. Thus, Shinji recognized that he would provide students with more dynamically interactive and collaborative work when he practiced teaching.

In addition to Shinji’s improvement of teaching, he demonstrated his micro-level development, teaching behavior, through observation of others’ teaching. For example, when watching an English teacher’s lesson, Shinji focused his attention on the teacher’s behavior and walking patterns in the classroom; how she would walk in the classroom or how students would hold an attitude while the teacher was moving. In Shinji’s actual teaching practice, he noticed that his walking pattern assumed a fixed movement, going around the classroom and stopping to see how students were working. When he noticed his simple walking pattern, he found out that he was not able to manage the classroom well.

4-2. Constructing Teacher Identity

Shinji had a meaningful experience during his teaching practice in the senior high school from which he graduated, even though he had only a two-week practice term. Reexamining his teaching experiences after two weeks, Shinji realized the complexity of constructing his teacher identity. Before the teaching practicum, Shinji believed that he would have more opportunities to talk with other teachers and receive helpful guidance from them to improve his ways of teaching. However, teachers became “businesslike” in the actual school setting: answering phone calls, meeting with educational officials, and managing homeroom events. This occasion impeded Shinji from connecting to a closer relationship with teachers and from consulting teachers about advice for teaching.

In his reflective journal after his teaching practicum, he described negative statements of construction of teacher identity.

To tell the truth, looking back on my teaching experiences in high school, I have had a large gap of teacher career which I imagined. For example, teaching, as an occupation, seems to be a job like a businessperson. In the high school where I taught, many teachers spent a lot of time managing their office duties. When I was noted in a diary, I saw lots of teachers answering phone calls, attending meetings, going to business trips, and waiting on persons who supported students' careers after high school. In my image, teachers use much time to prepare for their classes. However, unfortunately, I thought that teachers have less time to talk with students (Reflective journal).

As Shinji mentioned, he has been involved in English education and hopes to be an English teacher. He asserts his own firm teacher beliefs, interacting with students more inside/outside classrooms. These interactions strengthen the bond between students and teachers and encourage students to build their confidence in studies. Yet, in fact, he faced hard truths and struggled to construct a professional identity as an English teacher in public school. Instead, in interview, Shinji alluded that he has what it takes to be an English teacher in a cram school, *juku*². As he stated in his reflective journal, he needs a space for discussing the issues of English teaching with other teachers. Unfortunately, he had few opportunities to talk a lot or even to share ideas with teachers during his practicum. Thus, he leaned toward being a teacher in a cram school with a little confusion in his mind, implying in the interview, “I often thought that I should

work for a cram school if teachers in public schools have a lot of desk work rather than classes. In cram school, I think that teachers can talk more with students, prepare for classes, and teach with their own approaches without any inhibition.”

Through teaching practice in senior high school, Shinji constructed his teacher identity but lost his will to be an English teacher in junior/senior high school with its numerous complexities.

Discussion

This research on exploratory teaching by the research participant has led to considering the following future research implications. First, inquiries of teacher development through self-awareness of teaching as well as of construction of teacher identity by pre-service teachers require a long-term vision to examine. Even though it is feasible to understand the processes of how teachers try to teach, construction of teacher identity in a short period represents a small part of growth as a teacher. In this research, Shinji had difficulty in constructing his teacher identity positively. Before beginning the teaching practicum, he showed with the enthusiasm that he wanted to be an English teacher. Despite his keen purposefulness, the actual experiences in the high school inhibited him from developing his identity as an English teacher in school. Since the term of teaching practice was for only two weeks, Shinji would not be able to gain the expected results of teaching. Therefore, it remains possible that a long-period teaching practicum or practice will provide a reasonable chance to explore one's forging teacher identity.

Second, teacher development deserves considering involvement with others such as supervisors, co-workers, or other pre-service teachers. This study reflects the subject's voices of teaching experiences. However, more vivid descriptions by others will deepen the discussions on the issues of teacher development such as how teachers promote understanding of their teaching process sharing voice with others and how intervention of others is intertwined with expansion of self-awareness of teaching.

Summary

This inquiry examined how a Japanese EFL pre-service teacher explored his teaching in class and attempted to construct his teacher identity as an English teacher during a two-week teaching practicum in a senior high school. The research issue of teacher development in EFL contexts, especially Japanese EFL settings, has drawn keen attention, however, the key element of teacher development/education is not to explore a teacher's own teaching, or being more aware of teaching with beliefs or values but to

find a best way to teach in class, taking a judgmental stance. Hence, the prime purpose of this investigation was to examine a Japanese EFL pre-service teaching exploration and his construction of teacher identity based on the voice of an actual teaching trainee to promote a clear understanding of the practical experiences. These include his teaching beliefs, philosophy, and professional progress as an English teacher.

The results indicated that Shinji tried to incorporate his own teaching activities and approaches to the classroom following his teaching beliefs even though he became perplexed with making tasks for English classes. Regarding his construction of teacher identity, Shinji had a negative stance to be an English teacher in public school because he confronted the reality of the actual school field site. He saw teachers doing various office duties rather than preparing for classes, which made him reconsider what his idea of being a teacher is in public school.

In this research, teacher exploration and construction of teacher identity was conducted although the research period was very short, a teaching practicum of two weeks. To show various results of pre-service teacher's teaching experiences, further studies of teacher exploration and building of identity derived from pre-service teachers' self-reflective voice and utilizing a naturalistic approach will be expected, since the field of teacher development in the Japanese EFL context has a high future growth potential among teachers and researchers.

Notes

1. Teaching practicum is a mandatory event to hold a teacher certificate in Japan. All prospective teachers require two-week practicum for senior high school and three-week for elementary and junior high school.
2. Cram school, *juku*, is a popular private institute as business nationwide in Japan. Most cram schools support students to enter prestigious universities/colleges, however, current *juku* has various types such as follow-up and private classes. Duke (1986) and Roesgaard (2006) clearly describe the purpose and function of the *juku* systems.

References

- Bailey, K. M., & Nunan, D. (1996). *Voices from the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bronowski, J. (1956). *Science and human values*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Burns, A., & Richards, J. C. (Eds.). (2009). *The Cambridge guide to second language*

- teacher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Casanave, C. P., & Schechter, S. R. (Eds.). (1997). *On becoming a language educator: Personal essays on professional development*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Clandinin, J. D., & Connelly, M. F. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Donaghue, H. (2003). An instrument to elicit teachers' beliefs and assumptions. *ELT Journal*, 57(4), 344-351.
- Duke, B. (1986). *The Japanese school*. New York: Praeger.
- Fanselow, J. F. (1988). "Let's see": Contrasting conversations about teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 22(1), 113-130.
- Fanselow, J. F. (1992). *Try the opposite*. Tokyo: Simul Press.
- Freeman, D. (1989). Teacher training, development, and decision making: A model of teaching and related strategies for language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(1), 27-45.
- Gebhard, J. G. (2005). Awareness of teaching through action research: Examples, benefits, limitations. *JALT Journal*, 27(1), 53-69.
- Gebhard, J. G. (2006). *Teaching English as a foreign or second language: A teacher self-development and methodology guide (2nd ed.)*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Gebhard, J. G. (2009). The practicum. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 250-258). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gebhard, J. G., & Oprandy, R. (1999). *Language teaching awareness: A guide to exploring beliefs and practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacobs, G. M., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2001). Paradigm shift: Understanding and implementing change in second language education. *TESL-EJ*, 5(1), A-1.
- Johnson, K. E. (2009). *Second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (Eds.). (2002). *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagamine, T. (2007). *Exploring teachers' beliefs through collaborative journaling: A qualitative case study of a Japanese preservice teachers' transformative development processes in an EFL teacher education program*. Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Indiana, PA: Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
- Nagamine, T. (2008). *Exploring preservice teachers' beliefs: What does it mean to become an English teacher in Japan?* Saarbrücken, German: VDM Verlag.

- Richards, J. C. (1998). *Beyond training*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (1990). The teacher as self-observer: self-monitoring in teacher development. In J. C. Richards, *The language teaching matrix* (pp.118-143). New York: Cambridge University press.
- Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2005). *Professional development for language teachers: Strategies for teacher learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Nunan, D. (Eds.). (1990). *Second language teacher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richie, J. S., & Wilson, D. E. (2000). *Teacher narrative as critical inquiry: Rewriting the script*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Roesgaard, M. H. (2006). *Japanese education and the cram school business: Functions, challenges, and perspectives of the juku*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Nias.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (2007). Complexities of identity formation: A narrative inquiry of an EFL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(4), 657-680.
- Shulman, L. (1986). Paradigms and research programs in the study of teaching. In M. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 3-36). New York: Macmillan.

Appendix 1: Shinji's Reflective Journal

自分が抱く教師像と指導法

私が教員になったら、ある程度寛容な教員になりたいと思っていました。例えば、生徒のテストの点がとても悪くても、決して叱ったりせず、「次頑張ろう」などと優しい声を掛けられるような。他には一生懸命努力している生徒を間違いをしたからと言って叱らず、なるべく褒めてあげられるような、これらの理由は決して自分が好かれたいなどの理由ではなく、私の「授業」を好きになってもらいたいからです。「授業」と聞くと多くの生徒は「かったるいもの」と思うと思います。しかし、せっかく多額な授業料を払い、学校には主に学習のために来ているわけですから、生徒は楽しく印象に残る授業を行ってあげるべきだと思います。私の抱いていた具体的な指導法とは、英語の授業中には英語を用いて授業を行うことです。教室に入って来て、挨拶はもちろんの事、授業の概要説明まで英語で行います。そうする事で他の授業とは異なった雰囲気生まれ、生徒たちの関心も引くことができ、さらに英単語や重要表現などのインプットも増やすことができると考えたからです。

教育実習後の変化

正直なところ、教育実習を終えた自分を改めて振り返ってみると、自分が抱いていた教員の職業感とは大きなギャップが生まれてきました。例えば、教員という職業は営業のような仕事に思えてきました。実習中に職員室で日誌の整理などをしていた時、ほかの先生方の多くは、電話対応や、会議、主張、進路ガイダンスのための来賓の方々の接待などに一日の大半を費やしていました。教員という職業は私のイメージの中では大半を授業に費やすことが常なのだと思っていました。しかし、実際はむしろ生徒達と費やす時間の方がかなり少ないと思えたほどでした。

要旨

教育探究と教師アイデンティティーの確立

－日本人英語学習者の教育実習記録－

藤枝 豊

教師教育研究は、教師自身の指導を振り返り、教育向上を目的とする研究であり、教師や研究者の間で注目されている。過去の教師教育研究は、教師を養成するために、「より良い指導法を探す」ことに重点を置いてきた。しかし、近年の教師教育・発達研究は、良い指導方法を見出すことではなく、教師自身の反省と自己認識を通じて、教師の指導法の習得過程を説明し、理解する調査が主流になっている。現職教員を対象とした教師教育研究は多々あるが、教師を目指す学生や新任前教師（pre-service teacher）を対象にした調査は少ない。特に教員志望学生が、実際の教育現場で、どう自分自身の指導方法を探究しているのか、自分自身の教育信念や価値をもとに、教師としての自我をどう確立しているのかを調査した内容はほとんどない。

本研究は、英語専攻の日本人学習者が高等学校での教育実習を通じて、どう自分の指導を探究したのか、そして被験者の英語教師としての自我の確立を検証する。その結果、被験者は、クラスで実施するタスク作成に悩まされながらも、自分自身の教育信念をもとに、教室内で様々な言語活動を提供した。一方、英語教師としての自我の確立は困難であった。実際の教育現場で体験した教師の仕事内容は、自分が抱いていた理想と大きなギャップがあった。