

# Explorations in Teacher Education

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## **And Now a Word from...The Editor**

Hello and welcome to the Conference edition of Explorations in Teacher Education (Volume 16, Issue 3), the newsletter of the Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG) of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT).

This issue has been timed to coincide with the JALT National Conference 2008 in Tokyo, so I hope at least some people will read it there! To anyone reading this at the conference I hope you enjoy yourself. The Teacher Education SIG AGM will be in room 405 on Saturday, November 1<sup>st</sup> from 6:05pm to 6:30pm.

This issue of the newsletter has three articles. First, we have another article by Dr Hideo Kojima who was the featured speaker at the 2008 JACET / JALT Joint Regional Conference held in Nagoya in June this year. The article is about collaborative, autonomous and reflective (CAR) learning and Dr Kojima's attempts to promote it to teacher trainees.

The second is, "Teaching Practice through Students' Eyes," by Anthony Robins. In my experience there is a lot of misunderstanding and urban myth surrounding the amount and quality of training that Japanese teachers receive, at least amongst the foreign teaching community in Japan. I teach English to teacher trainees at one of the universities I work at, and so I am somewhat better informed than many people. However, my knowledge is only that acquired through casual conversation with my students over the course of a few years. Anthony is in a strong position to comment on this area because he works at an education university and is directly responsible for supervising teaching practices. Consequently, I found his article informative and it served to dispel some of the inaccuracies in my knowledge of the situation. I highly recommend it.

Lastly we have an article by Simon Cooke titled, "Changing Practice in an Eikaiwa School." It is good to see some evidence of innovation in the Eikaiwa part of the profession. As most of my submissions come from university educators it is something of a departure to receive an article like this. In fact, in the four years I have been editor I have published approximately 38 articles by university educators, ten by people working in high schools and only this one by "others."

Hope you enjoy the issue.

Simon Lees, Editor.

## **A CARL Approach to Promoting EFL Teacher Trainees' Autonomy in Pre-Service Teacher Education at a Japanese University**

**Hideo Kojima, Hirosaki University <kojima@cc.hirosaki-u.ac.jp>**

### Introduction

In current English language teaching (ELT) in Japanese universities, a paradigm shift is taking place from teaching-centeredness to learning-centeredness. University teachers, who are often seen as “authority figures of knowledge,” are likely to be expected to move on from an old paradigm of teaching and to develop a new approach to ELT, where knowledge is jointly constructed by students and teachers in learning-centered classrooms. As an EFL teacher trainer, I need to help my trainees to develop their autonomy in language learning/teaching and communicative competence in English at university level. This study is concerned with collaborative, autonomous, and reflective learning (CARL) in pre-service EFL teacher education. I have been using CARL with my second year students, who have just started to learn about TEFL. I emphasize the integration of the three concepts of collaboration, autonomy, and reflection. Such integration is necessary if trainees' professional competence and autonomy are to be promoted.

### Theoretical Background

#### *Learner Autonomy*

*Learner autonomy*, which is stressed in educational reform in Japan, seems to be expected to have a social as well as individual dimension. Interestingly enough, more attention has recently been paid to this aspect of autonomy in the West. Ryan (1991) sees the achievement of a sense of autonomy as one of the most fundamental needs and purposes of human beings, and uses a term that is especially significant for my study: “autonomous interdependence”. In my CARL program, I encourage my trainees to develop their autonomy through positive interdependence.

Autonomous learning within an institutional context in Japanese higher education is the means as well as the aim for the development of learner autonomy. Setting up an autonomous learning environment, which is not teaching-centered but learning-centered, puts certain demands on university teachers as well as students. Autonomous learning may be described as what takes place in situations in which the teacher is expected to provide a learning environment where the learners are given the possibility, to consciously be involved

in collaborative and reflective learning.

### *Collaborative and Reflective Learning*

I regard *collaboration* and *reflection* as strategies to develop autonomy in language learning and teaching. While there are differences among the models of collaborative learning (CL), Johnson and Johnson (1999) and other researchers point out five key elements of CL: a) positive interdependence, b) individual accountability, c) face-to-face interaction; d) social skills, and e) group processing. Research on CL has been conducted in numerous countries and cultures and different researchers seem to have different definitions of CL (Kessler, 1992; Nunan, 1992; Olsen & Kagan, 1992). I integrate the above five key elements in my CARL approach.

In the learning-centered classroom, teaching and learning are inextricably and elaborately linked. Reflective learning may help students to develop their metacognitive abilities and learner autonomy in language learning through a reflective process of self-awareness, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and group processing. Reflection is not just about self-improvement and self-development but also about understanding and questioning the contexts in which teaching and learning take place.

Japanese teachers are likely to face many instructional and institutional challenges when they implement CARL in their classrooms. These include a) the changing role from lecturer to facilitator, b) the shift in authority from the individual instructor to shared authority with the group of learners, c) careful planning of the instructional setting such as timing and efficiency concerns, and d) assessment issues such as group versus individual grades. CARL could be described as a culture-sensitive approach to pre-service EFL teacher education.

## Method

### *Purpose of the Study*

In order to have an opportunity for future implementation, CARL needs to be modelled for the pre-service teachers and experienced by them as learners. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of CARL in developing EFL teacher trainees' autonomy at my Japanese university. My research question was: To what extent can CARL be effective in promoting the pre-service teachers' autonomy?

### *Participants*

This CARL program involved 56 second-year university students who attended the class

*“English Teaching Methodology.”* They had low intermediate to high intermediate levels of English. This compulsory class for second-year students, who had already decided to obtain a teaching license, met for 90 minutes every week during the semester. Most of the teacher trainees would like to be EFL teachers in primary or secondary schools after graduation.

### *Materials*

In order to analyze the effectiveness of the CARL program, I collected quantitative and qualitative data: questionnaires to survey how the group work was proceeding and the teacher trainees’ summative evaluations of their CARL experience; the trainees’ reflections on CARL; and my class observation and reflection on CARL.

### *Procedures*

At the beginning of the semester I tested Littlewood’s (1999) cooperative learning (CL) predictions in my class in order to determine what kind of approach I could introduce into the trainee-centered classroom at my university (see Appendix). Regarding the reasonable extent of agreement with the importance of relationships within the group or socially-oriented motivation, the response pattern of my trainees looked similar to that of Littlewood’s Hong Kong students. However, the trainees were more likely to have negative attitudes towards discussion within a group and hesitation in voicing their opinions or questions in the open classroom. The trainees had studied in a traditional, teacher-centered curriculum for a long time. We discussed the results of the data analysis and decided to implement a CARL approach. Although the trainees had not experienced CARL at university level before, they showed a great interest in the new approach.

The trainees were divided into small groups (four students in one group). Each group was given a research topic on English Language Teaching (ELT), such as the Grammar Translation Method, Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach, and Communicative Language Teaching. After investigating the topic in collaborative group work, every group gave a presentation on the topic (including micro-teaching) in front of the classroom, and then led a whole-class discussion. For a half-term review of CARL, I administered a questionnaire to examine how the group was working. After finishing all groups’ presentations, I gave some comments on their activities, implemented a questionnaire for summative evaluation, and asked them to write their opinions about their CARL experience in an open-ended questionnaire.

## Results and Discussion

Taking the philosophy of CARL instruction into consideration, I integrated the concepts of collaboration, autonomy, and reflection. The teacher trainees practised CARL throughout the program, and I expected them to understand its relationship to dependent variables such as social and academic outcomes, and finally to value CARL as a lifelong learning strategy. It is important for them to experience CARL frequently throughout their teacher training. In particular, I needed to encourage them a) to appreciate the value of CARL, b) to confront their own learning histories and resistances to CARL, c) to experience the differences that the CARL process would make in their own learning, and d) to study the principles guiding the application of CARL (Brody 2004:188). In this study, I did not have a control group to compare them with. Thus, it is not a study comparing CARL with any other kind of approach.

### *Review of how the group is working*

In order to build in time for reflection on CARL activities and to facilitate the trainees in discussing the issues that had emerged for individuals, Questionnaire 1 was administered when the trainees appeared to have become used to collaborative group work. Table 1 shows the mean responses to Questionnaire 1, which was designed to review how the group was working. The trainees were asked to individually read each item carefully and to circle the appropriate number for each response. They then were asked to compare and discuss the issues that had emerged for them with the rest of the group.

#### Table 1 Questionnaire 1: Review of How the Group Is Working

Individually, read each item carefully and circle the appropriate number for each response.

5—strongly agree 4—agree 3—neutral 2—disagree 1—strongly disagree

Teacher trainees n=56

MA=Mean Agreement

Item	5(%)	4(%)	3(%)	2(%)	1(%)	MA
1. The climate is friendly, individuals are relaxed and all members are on task.	36	48	14	2	0	4.2
2. Everyone is working. Everyone has a role.	64	32	4	0	0	4.6
3. Everyone understands what they have to do and is clear about their role and responsibilities.	45	50	5	0	0	4.4
4. Everyone listens to each other. All ideas are given a hearing.	41	52	7	0	0	4.3
5. Conflict and disagreement arise. The group manages this and finds solutions. Everyone agrees to keep to the decisions made.	27	52	19	2	0	4.0
6. People are open and honest. They make constructive suggestions for change. Complaints are accepted and solutions are found in the group.	23	52	25	0	0	4.0
7. People can share their feelings in the group.	29	45	23	3	0	4.0
8. The role of leader in the group changes from week to week or alternates in any one week.	11	21	48	16	4	3.2
9. When action needs to be taken all participants are clear what the group has decided to do. Individuals understand and take responsibility for the action they have agreed to take.	28	59	11	2	0	4.1
10. There are regular group reviews. Attention is paid to how the group is working. The group looks after itself.	23	43	23	11	0	3.8

(From Askew & Carnell 1998)

This questionnaire was administered for the half-term review of CARL. Involving the trainees in assessment led to a sense of shared responsibility for the learning in groups. My role was that of learning counselor and facilitator. Most groups seemed to be enjoying CARL, but as for item 8, the trainees' MA score (3.2) was considered to be low. Generally, it may not have been very easy for the trainees to take it in turns to be group leader. Also, the MA score of item 10 (3.8) was lower than I had expected. I encouraged them to promote their

metacognitive awareness and group processing, reminding them of how well they were achieving their goals and maintaining autonomous group work.

*Summative evaluation of CARL experience*

At the end of the CARL project, I needed to assess the learners in terms of the project's goals and objectives, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching. Every trainee was given an evaluation sheet and was asked to comment on their CARL experience.

Table 2 Questionnaire 2: Summative Evaluation of CARL Experience

Read each item carefully and circle the appropriate number for each response. You may add any comments you wish.

5—strongly agree 4—agree 3—neutral 2—disagree 1—strongly disagree

Teacher trainees n=56

MA=Mean Agreement

Item	5(%)	4(%)	3(%)	2(%)	1(%)	MA
1. Collaborative, autonomous, and reflective learning (CARL) in this class was beneficial.	54	41	5	0	0	4.5
2. CARL made mastering the material easier.	28	45	27	0	0	4.0
3. CARL made the experience of doing the out-of-class assignments more worthwhile.	20	50	28	2	0	3.9
4. CARL made the in-class group work more useful.	32	63	5	0	0	4.3
5. CARL made the overall experience of the course more enjoyable.	46	45	7	2	0	4.4
6. The size of my group was just fine.	55	27	14	4	0	4.3
7. The training I received for working in a team was largely appropriate.	18	53	25	4	0	3.9
8. I think my teaching ability has improved.	21	38	32	9	0	3.7
9. I am more interested in teaching English.	34	55	7	4	0	4.2
10. I want to learn how to teach English through CARL.	41	46	13	0	0	4.3

(From Sturman 1992)

Judging from the results, many trainees felt that: CARL in the class was beneficial (item 1; MA=4.5); CARL made the overall experience of the course more enjoyable (item 5; MA=4.4); CARL made the in-class groupwork more useful (item 4; MA=4.3); and that the size of their groups was just fine (item 6; MA=4.3). Also, they claimed to want to learn how to teach English through CARL (item 10; MA=4.3). However, it is necessary for me to note that the MA score of item 8 was the lowest (3.7). In order to improve the trainees' teaching ability, it might be better for me to develop a new collaborative, autonomous, and reflective approach



to teaching practice in the learner-centered communicative classroom in secondary schools. In addition to the above quantitative data analysis, I analyzed the qualitative data that I gathered through my observation, the trainees' reflection, and my reflection.

#### *Teacher trainees' reflection on CARL*

As for the trainees' reflection, some of their final comments on CARL were as follows:

<Positive>

- This learner-centered instruction is more meaningful than teacher-centered, knowledge-based instruction which still remains popular in universities.
- My positive attitudes towards EFL learning have been fostered in the communicative CARL classroom.
- I like the teaching style that includes group work, group presentation, and discussion in the open classroom. CARL might be one of the best approaches to EFL instruction that I have ever experienced in the classroom.

<Negatives>

- In CARL, individual members' opinions were sometimes sacrificed for the decision-making as a whole group. It was not easy for us to prepare for the group presentation. Understanding is one thing, and teaching is quite another.
- As a group leader, I was worried about group processing. More attention should have been paid to how the group was working. We could not promote group dynamics fully.
- The climate of our group was not good because some members showed negative attitudes towards CARL. I do not think that every member was on task.

Judging from the trainees' comments above, for the CARL approach to be more equitable and productive, I should have encouraged each group to make sure that all members a) understood the philosophy of CARL; b) took part in the task actively; and c) contributed equally to the success of their group. It appears to be necessary for the trainees to learn how to engage in the meaningful group discussion and investigation, and how to resolve interpersonal conflicts. If I prepared them only by lecturing about CARL, there would be almost no real impetus for change.

#### *Teacher educator's reflection on CARL*

The total learner-centeredness of this approach, where the trainees were preparing and presenting their own materials, presented me with a unique opportunity to watch carefully the trainees in action, and I learned a great deal about them: their presentations, their linguistic

strengths and weaknesses, their strategies for learning, and other skills and attributes that they possessed (organizational skills, leadership, and group management).

In my observation, it might be said that most groups managed to engage in CARL activities which included investigation, presentation, and discussion in the open classroom. The success of each group's presentation was measured by the responses and feedback of the other groups. I might say that there were a measure of in-built evaluation and a test of how much had been learned. Being an expert on a topic might noticeably increase each trainee's self-esteem, and getting more confident, week by week, could perhaps give a feeling of genuine progress.

On the other hand, most of the individual trainees seemed not to be used to such a learner-centered approach. Some of them were worried about CARL, partly because they did not know how to organize the group work collaboratively and autonomously, and partly because they were not good at collaborative investigation or presentation. Some of the trainees' difficulties that I observed were as follows:

- The trainees' interaction in English was sometimes very simplified due to lack of vocabulary and was not sufficiently specific.
- The number of male trainees was much smaller than that of female trainees. Each mixed-gender group consisted of four trainees including only one male trainee. He was likely to be a leader during the group work, even if he preferred individual performance.
- The trainees first had to get used to collaborative learning because almost all of them had never experienced CARL before.
- The trainees were used to working under the control of their trainer. It was not easy for them to work out strategies to fulfill their CARL task autonomously.
- Most of the trainees did not know how to contribute effectively to their classes. This undermined the principles of CARL on the positive contribution of all the participants.
- It was difficult for most of the trainees to understand the group topic because they had almost no background knowledge.

It might be difficult for the trainees to change their fixed learning styles. I encouraged all the trainees to understand that the "spoon-feed" system no longer exists in tertiary education. As a result, many trainees voluntarily exchanged their opinions or ideas about EFL learning and teaching in the open classroom. I recognized that individual trainees' characteristics in the same group were different from each other. For each group to be able to manage to follow its

own process of development, individual members had to overcome a variety of difficulties mentioned above.

In my teacher education programs, CARL is the prevailing philosophy from which almost all of my planning operates. I believe that the early part of initial teacher training is the most important in establishing a trainee's motivation and desire to effectively use CARL in future school classrooms. A problem plaguing Japanese teachers in secondary and tertiary education has been that many teachers tend to teach in only one way; that is, by the lecture method—the same way they were taught. Taking this into consideration, at the beginning of the CARL program, I instructed the trainees in the philosophy and strategies of CARL, and subsequently modelled these elements throughout the program.

### Conclusion and Implications

This study has attempted to discover to what extent CARL can be effective in promoting the initial teacher trainee's autonomy as a learner. The goal of CARL in pre-service EFL teacher education is to help each trainee to become increasingly self-directed and responsible for his/her own learning through collaborative, autonomous, and reflective group work. This process might mean a gradual shift of the initiative from the trainer to each trainee, encouraging him/her to bring in personal contributions and experiences. Through my CARL practice, I observed that the social-interactive, reflective processes tended to provide a means of working towards self-directed, autonomous learning. Increasing trainee-initiated group work offered pedagogically effective ways of evaluating autonomous learning in initial teacher education.

In order to improve my CARL approach, I have to help the trainees a) to have more opportunities to experience CARL constantly in initial teacher education at the university, b) to employ CARL in their teaching practice in the school classroom, c) to develop their communicative competence through content-rich tasks, d) to develop their metacognitive skills for planning, self-reflection, self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and group processing, and e) to promote their individual accountability and social skills through collaborative learning. In the spirit of trainee-centered thinking, careful pedagogical thinking needs to be attached to the trainee's role in the whole process of learning. The trainee is expected to be a communicative, collaborative, reflective, and autonomous learner. Increasing trainee-initiated independent work in small collaborative and reflective learning teams may offer pedagogically effective ways of evaluating autonomous learning in pre-service EFL teacher

education. I would like to continue developing my CARL approach through action research.

Trainee-centered learning does not mean leaving the trainee alone and without support. In the communicative trainee-centered classroom, we teacher trainers are expected to clarify our basic educational philosophy, and to welcome our new functions as facilitators, information-gatherers, decision-makers, motivators, input providers, providers of feedback, and co-communicators (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). New training capacities include identifying trainees' cognitive and affective factors, and helping trainees to become more autonomous, collaborative, and reflective practitioners and researchers. Ongoing dialogue and trust between trainers and trainees can be considered to be a key factor to success.

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#### Appendix

Questionnaire: Testing Littlewood's CL Predictions

Read each item carefully and circle the appropriate number for each response.

5—strongly agree 4—agree 3—neutral 2—disagree 1—strongly disagree

Teacher trainees n=56 MA=Mean Agreement HK=Hong Kong(n=50)

Predict	5(%)	4(%)	3(%)	2(%)	1(%)	MA	(HK)
1. I like activities where I am part of a group which is working toward common goals.	23	59	18	0	0	4.1	4.0
2. I like to take part in activities which involve discussion within a group.	16	43	29	12	0	3.6	3.9
3. When I am working in a group, I like to help maintain a sense of harmony in the group.	23	62	11	2	2	4.0	4.0
4. In the open classroom, I often feel hesitant to 'stand out' by voicing my opinions or questions.	27	37	23	11	2	3.8	3.2
5. In the classroom I see the teacher as an authority figure.	7	45	37	9	2	3.5	2.8
6. I tend to see knowledge as something to be 'transmitted' by the teacher rather than 'discovered' by me as a learner.	0	32	23	36	9	2.8	2.6
7. I expect the teacher (rather than me myself) to be responsible for evaluating how much I have learnt.	2	21	50	23	4	2.9	3.0
8. I feel strong motivation to follow through learning tasks of which I perceive the practical value.	16	48	29	7	0	3.7	3.7
9. I feel more motivated to work when my own success contributes to the goals or prestige of significant group (e.g. family, other students).	25	46	27	2	0	3.9	3.5
10. In the classroom I feel very concerned to perform well and correctly in what I do.	18	45	25	10	0	3.7	3.8

(Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics* 20(1), 71-94.)

## **Coming back to their youth and acting as a man - Teaching Practice through Students' Eyes**

**Anthony Robins, Aichi University of Education**

Articles in English on the process of teaching practice (kyouiku jisshuu) in Japan are relatively few. A number have focussed squarely on the negative aspects, including Christensen (2004), Iida (2005) and Ryan (2006). Iida's, from the viewpoint of the school based 'mentor', criticizes the lack of guidance by the university supervisor and the tendency of teaching practice to perpetuate the 'status quo' instead of encouraging innovation. Ryan's, from the viewpoint of a university of education faculty member, bemoans the relatively weak role of a supervisor like himself. His role is constrained by the need to keep a steady university-school relationship, limited by the focus on what he sees as the 'stage-managed' demonstration lesson (kenkyuu jugyo) and the absence of clear and comprehensive evaluation. Christensen's, also from a faculty viewpoint, makes clear the limited role he feels he can play when he writes, "As part of my work I am occasionally entrusted with the job of observing and *lending gravitas* (my italics) to the lessons that aspiring teachers teach as the culmination of their practicum at junior or senior high schools." (p.16) In contrast, Yonesaka (1999) takes a much more neutral view as she provides a comprehensive and coolly impersonal description of the organisation of teaching practice in Japan.

However, none of these really address the role and validity of teaching practice for the students who take part in it. Thus, in this article, I attempt to give them a voice through use of two kinds of feedback which I have collected. The first, providing mainly quantitative feedback, is a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) which was answered by eleven students in 2007 and thirteen in 2008. The second, providing more qualitative feedback, was an essay written by nine of those eleven students in 2007 and all but one of the thirteen students in 2008.

Before focussing on their views, it is useful to briefly describe the background to teaching practice at this university, a university of education, formerly a national university but now an autonomous public corporation. As elsewhere in Japan, the length of teaching practice is relatively short. In fact, legally it only needs to be a total of three weeks. This contrasts with other locations. To take two examples in the U.K., for the 2003-4 academic year, the University of London's Institute of Education's one-year P.G.C.E. (Postgraduate Certificate of Education) offered two periods stretching from mid-October to late-January and from late-

February to late May, and this has currently developed to "substantial, sustained blocks of practical teaching in all three terms." Turning to ITT (Initial Teacher Training), St Mary's University College in southwest London mandates school placements lasting around three months just in the first year of a four-year course. Leshem and Bar-Hama (2008) give the impression that their teaching practice environment in Israel is markedly more all-encompassing as they describe how their trainees are placed in a host school at the beginning of the academic year and formally assessed twice a semester. (p.258) Closer to Japan, Hong Kong Institute of Education describes students being "progressively inducted to Field Experience leading to a 12-week Block Teaching Practice in school in the final year." (p.31)

Returning to the environment for the present study, this university actually offers two types of courses, teaching courses (kyouin yousei katei) and contemporary liberal arts courses (gendai gakugei katei). While a greater percentage of students from the former become teachers, students from the latter can actually also become teachers. However, there is a difference in the length of teaching practice. While for the former, it involves four weeks in October in the students' third year and two weeks in June in their fourth year, it is just four weeks in June in the students' fourth year for the latter. In addition, there are also brief periods of lesson observation earlier in their student lives, notably what is known as 'kiso jisshuu' (basic practice) in their first year. Teaching practice takes place at both regular schools, including students' own alma maters, and schools attached to the university (fuzoku gakko). In the case of the eleven students who replied to the 2007 questionnaire, three did teaching practice at attached schools and in the case of the 2008 students, it was nine.

This article uses feedback from students in one of the contemporary liberal arts courses, the 'International Culture Course'. Taking the thirteen students from 2008, they were among eighteen students who joined my fourth-year 'English Communication' class. Thus, five students did not undertake teaching practice. In addition, given the fact that several of the thirteen who completed it already had other firm job offers, it can be presumed that only a certain number of the thirteen will actually take up teaching as a career. Apart from completing teaching practice, students must pass qualification tests in the summer of their fourth-year with final results at the beginning of October.

To give an idea of their overall perceptions, it is useful to first look at question 3, 'Before you started your teaching practice, how did you feel about becoming a teacher in the future?' and



question 4, 'Now you have finished your teaching practice, how do you feel?' from the questionnaire which address any contrasts in their feelings before and after teaching practice. On a seven-point scale (with 7 = most positive), students averaged 5.09 in 2007 and 4.77 in 2008, as their pre-scores. As regards their post-scores, these rose to 5.82 in 2007 and 5.615 in 2008. While in 2007 five became more positive and six were unchanged, in 2008 ten became more positive, two less positive and one was unchanged. Thus, overall perceptions improved. However, a certain contrast is provided by question 6 concerning the difficulty of the experience, 'How did you find the experience of teaching English?', which indicates the pressures that teaching practice brought. On a seven-point scale (with 7 = very difficult), average response was 6.18 in 2007 and 5.96 in 2008.

To draw some insights into why students had these feelings, it is useful to turn to qualitative results gained from essays written for the end of semester assessment (first semester of their fourth year), shortly after the conclusion of the teaching practice period. While students had alternative titles on other themes, the majority who had done teaching practice wrote on this subject, answering the following question:

'Please write a report about your teaching practice. Include a brief introduction explaining why you became interested in becoming a teacher and what you were expecting before you started teaching practice. In the body paragraphs of your report, describe your positive and negative experiences. Conclude your report by relating it to your future plans. Were you encouraged to take up teaching as a career?'

I decided to analyse these essays by looking at how many and at what length students wrote about the following issues:

- a: their motivation to be a teacher
- b: their past experience, including teaching in cram schools or as home tutors
- c: the amount of teaching they did during teaching practice
- d: their relationships with school students
- e: degree of advice and guidance given by their school mentor
- f: teaching strategies they used
- g: their feelings about being a teacher in the future

The first and the last were most universally addressed, with all nine from 2007 and ten from 2008 addressing a: and seven from 2007 and nine from 2008 addressing g:.

Reasons for wanting to become a teacher included love of children, enjoyment of the subject (English), part-time work experience and the feeling that it was, "one of the most influential jobs. One teacher can change many lives." (F, 2008). However, most frequently cited was the influence of a teacher, including students' parents in some cases, acknowledged by ten students. This indicates that the teacher guiding them during teaching practice, effectively their mentor, is likely to exert a strong influence. Regarding their future as teachers (g), most felt encouraged by the experience of teaching experience, bearing out the improvement in attitude referred to above, while a smaller number felt challenged, bearing out the difficulty referred to above. Only two students who referred to this area explicitly indicated that they would try to receive a licence but not become a teacher (F, 2008) or just teach part-time (F, 2008).

Occurring most frequently apart from these was a concern about relationships with students, referred to by four 2007 students and nine 2008 students. While some students were confident that they had built up good rapport, as in the case of these two, "Just as I expected, I could make a good relationship with these students." (M, 2007) and "I think a teacher must approach the students with an open mind." (F, 2007), others were concerned about balance, "I tried to scold them (students), but I couldn't because I was worried the relationship between me and them would break." (F, 2008) or found themselves worrying that they were isolated, "because I couldn't find out the way 'how to talk to them', so I couldn't say anything during lunchtime." (F, 2008) While the teacher:student relationship is universally important, LeTendre attests to its primacy in Japan when he writes that, "(This) emotional connection or sense of solidarity is crucial, teachers stated, in motivating and guiding children. Teachers who lacked such connection generally had more disruptive classes." (p.278)

While only one student (F, 2008) mentioned the number of classes she had taught in her essay, question 5 from the questionnaire, 'How many classes did you teach during teaching practice?', provided the result that students' involvement in lessons ranged from 1 hour to 41 hours in 2007 (average 13.32 hours) and from 3 hours to 15 hours in 2008 (average 9.54 hours) although it has to be said that it is quite possible than students may have interpreted 'teaching' in various ways. This also may bear out Yonesaka's reference to the range of involvement in teaching practice when she wrote that, "Many of my own students spent much of the practicum observing classes, but not necessarily "passively", as careful observation is an intense activity. Some of them had the opportunity to team-teach with ALTs, and a few had complete control of English classes for almost the entire practicum." (p.12)

I suggested above that the past influence of their own teachers or parents who were teachers might encourage a particularly strong role for their mentor during teaching practice. LeTendre indicates that this is a feature of Japanese teacher-training, not only during teaching practice but also in the early years of a teacher's career: "The Japanese ideal I encountered most often linked an enthusiastic young teacher with a seasoned veteran who guided the youngster's energetic attempts. The idea that one is not a "veteran" (betoran) teacher until one has had 15 years or so of classroom experience demonstrates the expectation that teachers, like students, need to learn from their seniors and from years of hard-won experience." (285-6) This appears to conform to the resilience of apprenticeship-like training across a wide spectrum of Japanese employment.

So, what did the students reveal about their interaction with their mentors? Just five of the 2007 and three of the 2008 students referred to this area in their essays and fairly briefly. Relationships appear positive, except for one student (F, 2008) who wrote at greater length on this area than others and described "a bad relationship with my supervisor." She wrote that, "I couldn't gain good teaching skills at all because my supervisor didn't come to see my class." However, she also wrote more positively that, "She gave me so many tasks so that I couldn't write reports which I had to do everyday. However, I didn't care about it because the tasks she gave to me were mostly benefited (sic) to my future career."

However, apart from the essay, the questionnaire (Appendix 1) included the more qualitative follow-up question 9 about their relationship with mentors and other teachers at their schools. This was answered by all students. Of the 2007 group, nine comments reflected their positive response to question 8. However, one of these reveals both praise and pressure in writing, "Every teacher was kind and always gave me good advice. They often talked to me. I learned a lot through what they talked. In addition, some teachers gave me chocolate or snacks when I worked *after 9 o'clock* (my italics). At least timewise, truly bearing out Yonesaka when she writes, "I believe that, for Japanese pre-service teachers, the impact of the practicum is to invite them into the culture of teaching." (p.11) Three comments by students who had given 'positive', 'neither positive nor negative', and 'slightly negative' responses to question 8 reflected mixed feelings but also realism about the pressures of the job. As one of these three wrote, "My teacher was so strict, and criticized me. I'm always reprimanded about my class and guidance record. But, now, I thought about my teaching practice calmly. My teacher told me the real educational scene." One strongly and clearly reinforced the 'negative' response given in question 8, writing, "My teacher didn't give me useful advice.

More worse (sic), my teacher complained about his colleague a lot." Turning to the 2008 group, their responses to question 9 paralleled their responses to question 8, with eleven of the thirteen showing praise such as this, "Teachers helped and advised me very kindly and enthusiastically." One of the two less positive responses, from a student who had answered 'slightly negative' to question 8, was "She pushed her idea and her teaching style." Seemingly too much!

Before concluding, it is useful to briefly consider another follow-up question from the questionnaire, question 10, 'If you could change or improve the teaching experience, what would you do? Please write your opinions.' While there were various replies concerning improving their English level and perceived deficiencies, which were rarely referred to in the essays, perhaps particularly relevant to the experience of teaching practice were two 2007 students who came to a realisation of the need for greater proficiency in, and understanding of, 'classroom English' and returning to an issue raised at the beginning of this article, the amount of teaching practice. A 2007 student wrote, "I want to practice more, for example two months.", while one from 2008 considered a change to be necessary in breadth rather than length, writing, "If I had watched more classes which other teachers took, I would have made use of what I had watched in my lessons."

I hope that the students' comments which have been given have helped to illuminate their feelings about this key event in their university lives. Undoubtedly, there are issues concerning length, uniformity, and criteria for assessment during teaching practice in Japan. Perhaps, the relatively limited involvement of the university supervisor and the students' awareness of the centrality of their relationships with mentor and students actually spares them the challenge of meeting the wider range of expectations described by Kennedy when she writes, "The trainees' lack of experience and knowledge mean that what might seem straightforward decisions to trainers, are problematic to the trainee faced with the competing expectations of the school, the pupils, and the supervising tutors." (p.159) Rather, the strong effect of the teaching practice experience on students, immediately obvious after they return from this short but intense experience is illustrated by two final comments from students. One (F, 2007) wrote, "I could come back to my youth. I led a full life with fine students." The other (M, 2007) felt that "I acted not only as a teacher, but also as a man." While one in a sense looks back and the other forward, they convey the intensity of this experience which is just the first stage of a potential lifetime of actually practising teaching.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for 4<sup>th</sup> year students returning from teaching practice.

TEACHING PRACTICE - YOUR EXPERIENCE

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO GIVE YOUR NAME SO DO GIVE YOUR HONEST OPINION

1: What kind of school did you spend time at (junior high? senior high?)

\_\_\_\_\_

2: Was it an attached (附属) school or another school?

\_\_\_\_\_

3: Before you started your teaching practice, how did you feel about becoming a teacher in the future? Please circle your choice.

very positive | positive | slightly positive | neither positive or negative | slightly negative | negative | very negative

4: Now you have finished your teaching practice, how do you feel?

very positive | positive | slightly positive | neither positive or negative | slightly negative | negative | very negative

5: How many classes did you teach during teaching practice? \_\_\_\_\_

6: How did you find the experience of teaching English?

very difficult | difficult | slightly difficult | neither difficult or easy | slightly easy | easy | very easy

7 (More information on 6)

Why? Please write your opinions:

=====

=====

8: A teacher/teachers at the school helped and advised you. How did you feel about the help and relationship?

very positive | positive | slightly positive | neither positive or negative | slightly negative | negative | very negative

9: (More information on 8)

Why? Please write your opinions:

=====

=====

10: If you could change or improve the teaching experience, what would you do?

Please write your opinions:

=====

=====

Thank you for your comments

## Changing Practice in an Eikaiwa School

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### Introduction

This study examines the implementation of a student-centred curriculum in an eikaiwa (English conversation) school. This study examines the implementation of a student-centred curriculum and the value of adopting the practice of collaborative inquiry in an eikaiwa (English conversation) school.

### Literature

In attempting to establish collaborative learning activities in the classroom, value is placed on tasks that encourage students to adopt a frame of 'reflective enquiry'. This process echoes the call made by Hiebert et al. (1999) for tasks in which value is given not to their completion, but instead placed on "methods of solution [which] are as much dependent on inventiveness as imitation" (p.165). The implementation of such practices allows the students to "recognise the inventiveness of their own practice." (Lave et al., as cited by Heibert et al., 1999, p.163)

In making a distinction between a 'traditional' or directive form of teaching, and one in which participation in a community of practice is valued, Lave and Wenger (1999) distinguish between a 'teaching curriculum' and a 'learning curriculum' (p.24). The community that is suggested in the teaching curriculum is one which, according to Lave and Wenger is "mediated through an instructor's participation", who controls access to "resources for learning [and] the meaning of what is learned" (ibid.). The learning curriculum, by contrast, consists of "situated opportunities [...] for the improvisational development of new practice" (ibid.). It is a curriculum in which diverse contributions to the subject matter, a **participation** in the learning practice, are seen as crucial. Lave and Wenger call such participation 'legitimate peripheral participation'. For them the development of a curriculum which is characteristic of a community in which "participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (ibid., p.25) is no less than "an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge" (ibid.).

### Hypothesis

In the activities and methodology employed, the study aimed to create an environment which valued active participation and the creation of a community of learners *specific* to that environment. In creating this context, it was thought that a community would be engendered



in which students would work to create a class in which “it makes a difference if pupils believe that effort is more important than ability, that mistakes are an inevitable part of learning, and that they have control over their own learning” (Black, 1999, p.125).

### Background

The school is located in a small city in the north east of Japan. It is the only eikaiwa school in the area and has classes which cater for both adults and children. The children’s group classes meet just once a week for one hour and can consist of up to eight students. The teachers in the school are all native speakers of English.

The school’s curriculum is divided into ten topics consisting of a wide range of subjects (such as ‘transport’ and ‘fruit and vegetables’), comprising vocabulary lists, grammatical constructions and phonics drills. Whilst all these elements are required to be covered in the specified three- to four-week time-scale for each topic, a preferred methodology for their teaching is not stated. Reflecting this lack of prescriptive methodology, a variety of teaching styles and attitudes to the roles and relationships in the classroom can be observed in the school. Assessment tasks take the form of activities based on recall of the three previous months’ classes, which are summarised in one lesson, one week before the test takes place. The tasks usually take the form of timed vocabulary checks and the verification of correct responses to practiced questions.

### Method

Rather than introduce an entirely new topic and create confusion regarding sequencing of topics (the students and their parents are given topic timetables for the year), a selection of activities was created which required group participation, but which still retained the outer shell of what the school had proposed as the target vocabulary, phrases and spelling goals. A description of the activities used can be found in appendix v which can be accessed here:

[http://simondcooke.terapad.com/resources/16771/assets/Files/Changing Practice\\_Appendix\\_v\\_Activities.doc](http://simondcooke.terapad.com/resources/16771/assets/Files/Changing Practice_Appendix_v_Activities.doc)

Besides initial instruction of the method, the teacher played little role in the activities. By reducing actual teaching time, the teacher was instead free to observe the interactions and to undertake assessment.

Responses to a questionnaire among teachers in the school regarding teaching methodology and student and teacher role in the classroom among revealed an overwhelming preference

for teacher-led classes. In order to assess the kinds of interactions that might be present in these teacher-led classes, the same activities as above were carried out, with another group of students over a two-week period. With this second group, however, the teacher assumed the role of an 'authoritative figure' expecting students 'to excel individually' and to 'repeat the teacher correctly', as suggested by the responses to the questionnaire.

## Results

With the first, collaborative group, responses in the classes examined were wholly positive, with high participation levels seen. Favourable feedback was also gathered from the students upon completion of the tasks:

Teacher: Right. Which of the activities did you enjoy the most?  
Kazuya: I liked the 'Which do you like more?' thing.  
Teacher: Why?  
Kazuya: (...) because I had to think.  
Teacher: <laughs> don't you usually have to think in English conversation class?  
Kazuya: Yes, but it was like playing together.  
Teacher: and you enjoyed that?  
Kazuya: Yes, because we can kind of learn together. Like support?  
Teacher: do you think that helped you to learn?  
Kazuya: I don't know, but I remembered stuff and she remembered stuff and so it worked out.

(taken from turns 7-16, appendix ii)

Mana: It was good to make a team.  
Teacher: Right! You prefer to work as a team?  
Mana: Yes. Kind of (...) we help each other, so (...)  
Teacher: Right. Which do you prefer <laughs> working as a team, or working by yourself?  
Mana: I like working with a team more than working by myself.  
Teacher: Why is that?  
Mana: (...) we can help each other.  
Teacher: Okay. And is that different from me helping you?  
Mana: Yes, it's different (...)  
Teacher: Can you say why?

Mana: (...) kind of (...) we don't need to ask questions.  
Teacher: Okay, so you can maybe relax a little?  
Mana: Yes. I can get help soon.

(taken from turns 14-26, appendix ii)

The appendices which detail the interviews can be accessed here:

[http://simondcooke.terapad.com/resources/16771/assets/Files/Changing Practice\\_Appendices\\_i-iv.doc](http://simondcooke.terapad.com/resources/16771/assets/Files/Changing Practice_Appendices_i-iv.doc)

The classes in which the teacher took a more authoritative role saw a far more subdued atmosphere, with the teacher being called upon for direction, comprehension checks and general participation during the activities, far more often than in the student-centred classes. Other observations included a much reduced time taken in completing the tasks (see Shun and Ikuma's transcription, appendix iii(b)), utterances made in a rather mechanical delivery: "I like peas more than lemon. Okay. Next!" (Ayana, turn 87, appendix iii(a)) and boredom: "Hurry up and finish!" (Ayana again, turn 77).

Student interviews from this alternative use of activities also revealed expectations of teacher-led activities and concepts of the teacher as being the 'bearer of knowledge' in the classroom:

Ayana: Nami was very slow.  
Teacher: You could have helped her.  
Ayana: That's your job!  
Teacher: Do you think so?  
Ayana: It goes without saying! You're the teacher!

(taken from turns 6-10, appendix iv)

The interviews also revealed displeasure with a summative testing system and an environment in which students were encouraged to perform individually:

Ikuma: I don't like spelling because I can't understand it. And Shun is too fast.  
Teacher: What do you mean too fast? It isn't a competition.  
Ikuma: (...) I hate it.

Teacher:                Why do you care if he's faster?  
Ikuma:                 I can't win, so (...)

(taken from turns 10-14, appendix iv)

### Conclusion

The collaborative activities that were used in this study helped foster a community of learners who came to create and value a collaborative learning environment. This environment enhanced the learning and teaching processes in a tangible way for the benefit of all participants, without causing disruption to pre-established curriculum goals.

The study also revealed the importance which needs to be placed on the role that teacher methodology can play in creating the context for students to be able to challenge their notions of role in the classroom.

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