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EDITORIALS

Explorations in Genre Development

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It's uncontroversial to observe that exploration necessarily involves taking risks, experimenting with what we might otherwise take for granted. Likewise, we know that responsible exploration means attending to, and responding to, the situation in its full complexity and with its full history. It's nonetheless interesting to think through the implications of these points for explorations in abstract and concrete thinking. Exploratory thought is neither a fully theoretical exercise nor an exclusive focus on the practical.

Following Dewey's (1910/1997) distinction between the abstract and the concrete, thinking can be primarily directed toward simply more thinking or it can be the means toward some desired external end (p. 138), but what we are doing in education is trying to achieve a balance in these "mental attitude[s]" so that they develop "in easy and close interaction with each other" (pp. 143–144). All the articles in this issue seem attuned to this easy and close interaction in their own ways. From an editorial perspective, this commitment to balance has created interesting challenges to the traditional genre categories for this academic journal. It has been exciting to see the article categories expand or break off into new ones, as authors, reviewers, and the publications team have explored the possibilities beyond genre boundaries.

These explorations in genre development have coincided with my own uncertain ventures into participatory arts-based research in Hiroshima. Both have been experiences of constructive estrangement from the familiar, even that nuanced abstract–concrete dichotomy from Dewey. Jameson's (1999) interpretation of Brechtian theater further complicates this binary, as it becomes difficult to distinguish if "the original play or text exists in order to provoke the theory and give it content, occasion, and raw material," that is, to serve as a means to more thinking, or if the theory is a tool for better performance, that is, serving as a means to an external end (p. 81).

As in my recent research collaborations, Brechtian rehearsals tend to dissolve into discussion and then restart with actors cycling into different roles. Thus, the stage becomes less a space for the realization of "pre-formed event" than a space for transformation through multiple analyses and reconstructions: "something new and as yet unnamed may emerge from the lexicon of the already classified" (Jameson, 1999, p. 65).

Similarly, *Explorations in Teacher Development (ETD)* genres such as Research Articles, Reflections, Explorations, Perspectives, and even Editorials might emerge as new reconstructions under existing names or new ones. Some articles reconstruct the genres in seemingly familiar ways, while others go so far as to inspire new category names, but in this issue, they all make fresh contributions to thinking—simultaneously abstract and concrete—about teacher development.

Contributions to This Issue

Glen Stewart and Hayo Reinders report on an action-research project that takes "active learning" as something much more than an overly familiar slogan or top-down policy. In addition to presenting and analyzing findings across multiple research cycles, they distill their

interpretations into recommendations for practice. Moreover, as many of the best research articles do, their paper models a careful exploration into taken-for-granted concepts and methods.

James Taylor investigates the often overlooked issue of teacher disability, specifically of teachers dealing with chronic illness. His article draws on the strengths of an insider perspective on a sensitive issue and puts original qualitative research in productive dialogue with multiple lines of scholarship. By illuminating the experiences of teachers with chronic illness, it offers the potential to expand conceptions of disability and perceptions of how teachers are affected.

Michael Ellis reexamines the admonition against teacher talk in his reflection on starting lessons with brief small talk, that is, lighthearted anecdotes that do not necessarily have straightforward learning objectives. This reflection blends narrative inquiry with a small mixed-methods classroom research study to suggest more nuanced ways of thinking about and using teacher talk.

Koji Osawa reflects on his experience of finding ways to scaffold in-class speaking performance in a distance-learning context. This reflection sheds light on the importance of the social scaffolding of communication, even when it is mediated by computer and even when it is initially asynchronous.

Bob Kobylack, William Kuster, and Andrew Pedersen share their exploration into enhancing teacher collaboration within a university department with familiar online tools, which have taken on even more importance in times of pandemic.

Junyuan Chen shares her deep, and necessarily deeply personal, exploration of the literature on language teacher identity.

Timothy Ang reports on his satisfactions and dissatisfactions with his experience of being a part-time teacher at multiple universities, and from this vital lesser-heard perspective, makes the case for several possible improvements.

Other important contributions were the careful, constructive reviews from Deryn Verity, Chhayankdhar Singh, Ewen MacDonald, Daniel Hooper, Davey Young, Patrick Mannion, Yutaka Fujieda, Ryo Mizukura, David Bollen, Nate Olsen, and Nick Kasparek, as well as the proofreading of Andrew Hofmann and Nick Kasparek. Matthew W. Turner and Nick Kasparek contributed to the final layout, and Ewen MacDonald always goes above and beyond as Webmaster.

An Open Call for Papers

As this issue's articles across genres illustrate, *ETD* offers a scholarly outlet for researchers and practitioners who undertake a close and careful investigation into aspects of the work, thought, and continuous education of teachers, even when these scholarly reports may not fit easily into pre-formed categories. We welcome your submissions throughout the year, and we will work with you and peer reviewers toward publication in one of our two regular issues per year. "Beginner" authors—at all levels of experience—can find further guidance in the editorial for Volume 27, Number 3 (Kasparek, 2021). Please submit your manuscript with a brief cover letter to the email address below.

JALT.TED.ETE.editor@gmail.com

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RESEARCH ARTICLES

An Implementation of Active Learning in an English-language Course in Japan

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This paper reports the results of an action-research project focused on the implementation of active learning in an English-language course in the Japanese tertiary-level teaching context. To determine the extent to which active learning principles were able to be incorporated into the programme, regular observations of classroom practice were carried out using video recordings of whole-class activities, as well as audio recordings of pair and group work. These were complemented with questionnaires, interviews and learner self-reports, along with a focus group with other teachers, and a teaching log/journal kept by the lead author. The results of the study indicate some progress with the teacher-researcher's ability to implement active learning. A number of recommendations for practitioners are drawn from the results to help mitigate some of the challenges in implementing such change in language teaching practice within the Japanese EFL context.

Keywords: active learning, action research, teacher development, innovation, change

Active learning is an approach that has a decades-long history in general tertiary-level education internationally. The approach was developed in response to the perception that university students were not actively engaged enough when in general education lecture-style classes. Further engagement was seen as necessary so that students could achieve "fundamental liberal arts goals" (Isbell, 1999, p. 4), such as their becoming sufficiently independent and critical thinkers. The approach started to receive attention in general higher education in Japan around 2010 (Mizokami, 2014). More recently, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has recommended that active learning be implemented at all levels of the education system (Okada, 2019; Yoshida, 2016). Teachers should therefore be considering to what extent this is necessary in the specific course type(s) that they are responsible for. As a tertiary-level English-language teacher, I (the lead author) reflected about the necessity of implementing active learning in my own courses and ultimately decided that it was necessary. The main aim of the current article is to report the process that I went through to implement the approach in two classes of the same course type (a first-year, compulsory English-language course focused on helping learners to further develop their listening and speaking skills).

Literature Review

Active Learning

In the realm of general education, the term "active learning" still does not have a singular, concise definition (Shroff, Ting, &

Lam, 2019). A review of the relevant academic literature (Central Council for Education, 2012; Cooperstein & Kocevar-Weidinger, 2004; Dori & Belcher, 2005; Government of Japan, 2013; Ito, 2017; Ito & Kawazoe, 2015; Kamegai & Croker, 2017; Matsushita, 2018; Shroff, Ting, & Lam; 2019) indicates, however, that an implementation of the approach in a general education course in Japan would involve inclusion of a number of elements, as shown in Table 1.

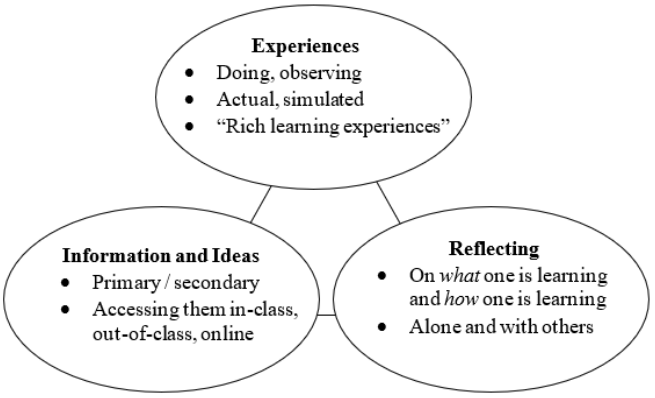
Table 1
Elements Needed to Implement Active Learning in a General Education Course in Japan

- Engaging learners in the overall learning process
- Giving learners some ownership over the course
- Having learners take on some of the responsibility for managing their own learning
- Learners being proactive
- Learning by doing
- Interaction with peers
- Having learners deeply process the content being studied through their engaging in a range of activities to achieve deep learning and deep understanding
- Learners self-reflecting about their own learning
- Learners developing self-regulation and life-long learning skills
- Learners developing generic/employability skills - e.g. leadership skills

An often-cited model of active learning is Fink's (2003) Holistic Model of Active Learning (Figure 1). According to this model, learners firstly access information or ideas, then observe them put into action and/or put them into action themselves, and finally reflect on what and how they are learning, either alone or with others, to facilitate the meaning-making process (see Caine, 2020, for a more complete overview).

In ELT, active learning has not been formally defined, but literature on the various practical implementations share a number of characteristics (Caine, 2020; Ishikawa, 2016; Jones & Palmer, 2017). These include identification of the principles underlying the approach and incorporation of course components that are commonly part of English-language courses, for example, task-based language teaching (TBLT), cooperative language learning (CLL), problem-based learning (PBL), higher-order thinking tasks, and critical thinking tasks. The researchers cited above each operationalized active learning in slightly different ways. This was perhaps due to the type of course being taught in each case. What we do not see in such studies is a more comprehensive operationalization of the approach that is in part informed by local definitions of it (e.g., a focus on deep learning and generic/employability skills).

Figure 1
Fink's (2003) Holistic Model of Active Learning



Methodology

This study was conducted with two compulsory first-year English classes in the fall term of 2019 at a tertiary institution just outside Tokyo in the Faculty of International Studies. The classes had twenty-three learners each (ages 18-20) and met once a week for ninety minutes for a period of fifteen weeks. The learners' mean TOEIC score was approximately 500.

Construct validity and ecological validity were established by providing a small

group of EFL professionals (including PhD holders) with the plans for the design of the study and the operationalization of active learning. Given that it was action research, I sought to establish trustworthiness by ensuring that the overall process had credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Class Resource

The classes used a mandated resource called NetAcademy Next (ALC Press Inc., 2017). The resource was used by learners both during class and between classes as homework. NetAcademy Next is an Internet-based application for English-language self-study (Stewart, 2019). The section used by learners for the current study was the listening and speaking section. This section had multiple units. One unit was assigned for a specific class (e.g. week 5 - organizing a tour when on vacation). When using the application, the learners would firstly complete the six steps in the listening part and then the three steps in the speaking part. The learners would work individually with the application using a microphone and headphones to do this. Teachers responsible for conducting classes in which learners used the application were asked to allow learners to use the application individually for forty to sixty minutes in the class and then provide one or more follow-up L2 speaking activities that learners would complete with their classmates in the same class.

The Research Cycles

The overall action-research process had three research cycles based on the model provided by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) (Figure 2).

Research Cycle 1 involved planning to implement. Thus, it did not conform to Cycle 1 in the figure above. This was because it was considered necessary that I use the first cycle to engage in such things as accessing the literature, reflection, operationalizing active learning, and devising a basic plan for the implementation. In Research Cycle 2, I engaged in the typical four-step process of plan-act-observe-reflect. Between weeks one and four, I collected data to formulate the action plan (this also involved revising the plan that I had formulated in Research Cycle 1) (plan). I implemented that in weeks five to nine (act). I also collected data during this time as a means to observe the impact of the action plan (observe). In week nine, I reflected on the impact to formulate the updated action plan (reflect). Research Cycle 3 proceeded in a similar fashion.

Data Collection

Figure 3 shows the data collection methods employed and when each method was employed.

Figure 2

Cyclical AR Model Based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) (adapted from Burns, 2010, pp. 8-9)

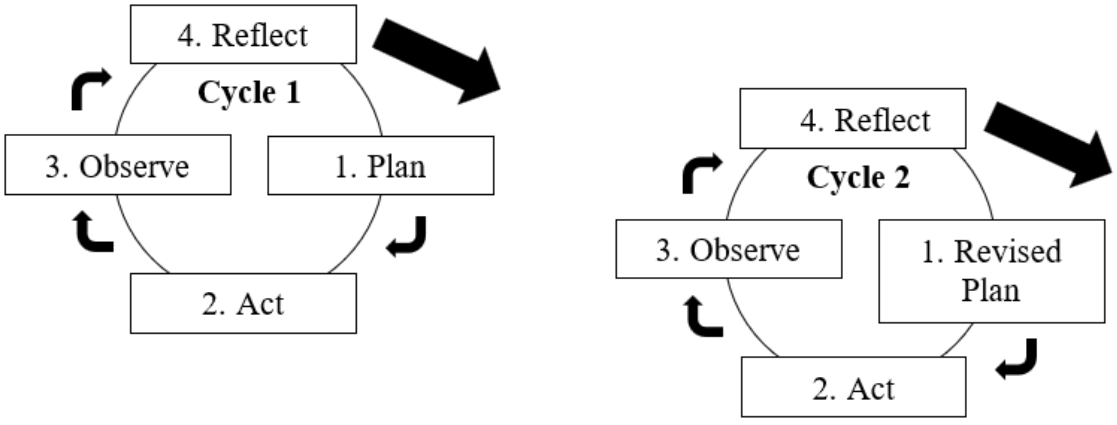
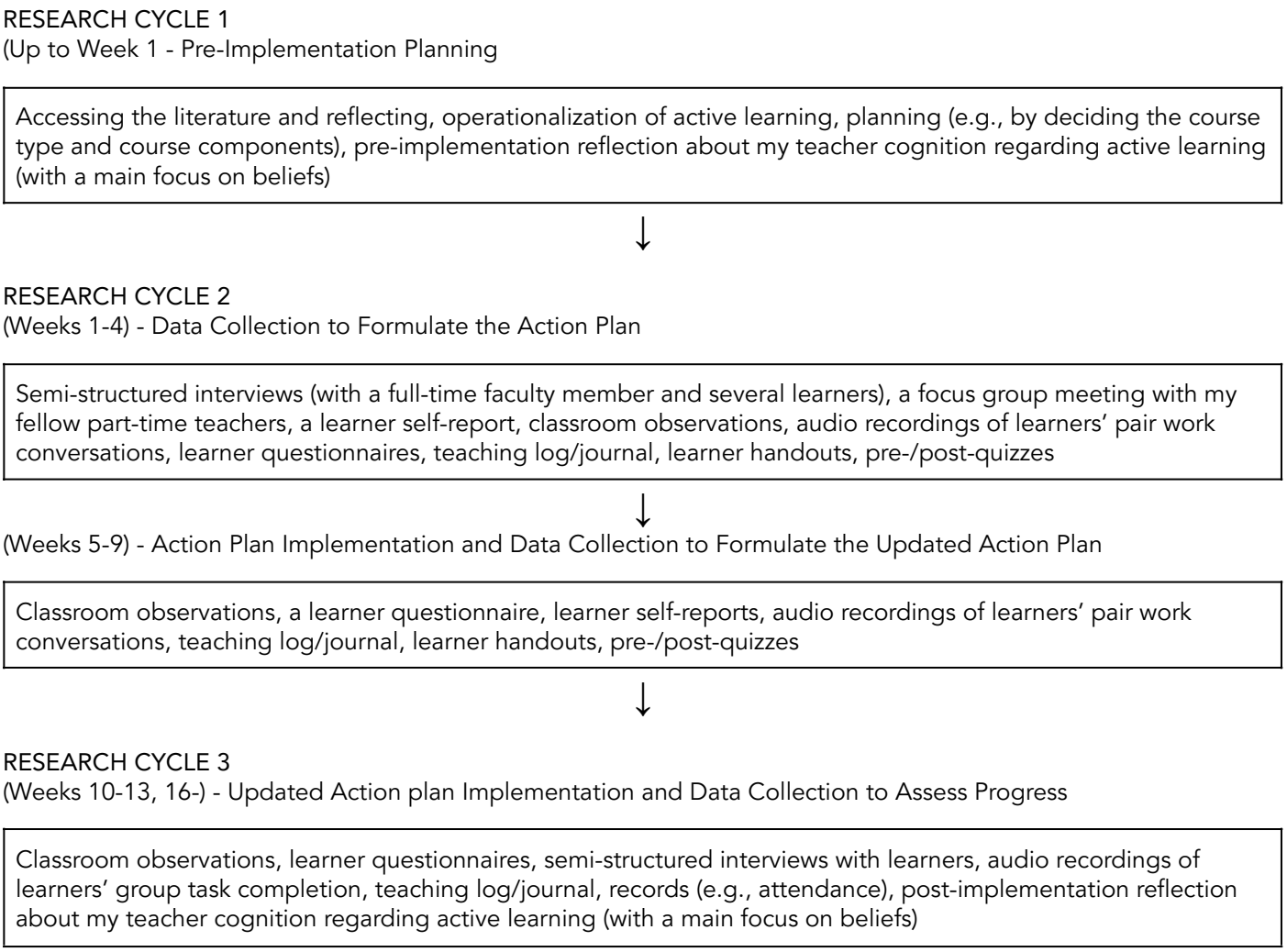


Figure 3
The Data Collection Methods Employed and When They Were Employed



Though in most cases the instruments were created for the purpose of the study, Egbert's (2003) Task Engagement Questionnaire was adapted from Jones (2018) to determine learners' level of engagement during task completion. Jones (2018) adapted the questionnaire for use with Japanese learners. I drew on his adaptation to inform the creation of the post-group task engagement mini-questionnaire. The validity and reliability of all relevant instruments were established using reliability analyses and post-hoc item analyses using JASP (2018). (See Appendix C for the audit trail.)

All data collection methods related to some aspect of the formulated operationalization of active learning (see the Results section for this). Table 2 indicates the constructs/aspects of the operationalization that each data collection method sought to provide a measure for.

Table 2
Data Collection Methods and the Constructs/Aspects of the Operationalization

Data Collection Method	Operationalization Constructs/Aspects
Learner self-report about the importance of the course	Engagement
Classroom observations	Engagement, interactivity and cooperation, learner-centeredness and learner autonomy, deep learning, generic and employability skills
Questionnaire 1	All/Most
Post-group task engagement mini-questionnaire	Task engagement, generic and employability skills
Leadership mini-questionnaire	Generic and employability skills
Semi-structured interviews with learners	Learner-centeredness and learner autonomy
Pre-/post-quizzes	Engagement (mental exertion)
Self-regulation self-report	Learner autonomy (self-regulation)
Audio recording of learners' pair work conversations	Engagement, interactivity and cooperation, learner autonomy (self-regulation)
Review of learners' handouts focused on completion and peer feedback	Learner-centeredness and learner autonomy (reflection)
Review of learners' homework portfolio	Engagement
Learner self-report about the course and their progress in it so far	Engagement
Questionnaire 2	All/Most
Attendance record	Engagement
NetAcademy Next homework unit completion record	Engagement, learner-centeredness and learner autonomy
Teaching log/journal	Teacher cognition All above (as applicable)

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted as part of each research cycle. For qualitative data, I made transcriptions (e.g., of the audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews with learners) and then went through an informal coding process. For any quantitative data, I entered the data in a spreadsheet, checked and cleaned the data, and then used JASP to generate descriptive statistics: mean, mode, and standard deviation. To formulate the action plans in Research Cycle Two, I conducted a basic examination of all data to identify priorities; that is, anything related to the operationalization that should be changed. I then used the list of priorities to implement the action plan.

After I had completed Research Cycle 3, I conducted a latent content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007) focused on aspects of and influences on my teacher cognition. This included focus on teaching-related beliefs,

self-beliefs, teacher identity, teacher resistance, teacher autonomy, motives, the impact of previous educational experiences, the impact of other teachers, emotions, and context. Inductive coding was firstly used to derive themes from the participants' data, then deductive coding was used to identify the aspects of and influences on my teacher cognition that were relevant. I drew on Phakiti (2015) and Goss-Sampson (2019) to conduct paired samples *t*-tests for the mini-questionnaires and the results were included as part of the latent content analysis. The results of the latent content analysis were used to inform my reflections about the implementation overall.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the institution in advance and was granted. Participation was voluntary and all participants signed an informed consent form. Confidentiality was ensured by the careful handling and storage of participant data. Any identifying materials were destroyed after a period of two years.

Results

In this section, we detail the process followed to implement the approach. It is written from the perspective of the lead author.

Research Cycle 1

During this cycle, I operationalized active learning by conducting a comprehensive review of the general education and SLA literature. I also decided the course contents and components and engaged in pre-implementation reflection about my teacher cognition (in particular, my beliefs). Table 3 lists the constructs and aspects of active learning that were included in the operationalization.

Table 3
The Operationalization of Active Learning (The Learners)

Construct	Aspect
Engagement	Attendance, participation, enjoyment, connection with the course, exertion of mental effort, homework completion, reviewing at home, absence of boredom and frustration
Interactivity and cooperativeness	Use of English as the main language of communication in the classroom, engaging in pair work and group work, giving and receiving peer feedback, helping classmates
Learner-centeredness and learner autonomy	Asking for help based on one's needs, deciding what English is important for oneself, self-regulating during the course generally during class time, self-reflecting, choosing which homework topics to complete, providing feedback about and suggestions for the course
Deep learning	Taking part in review speaking tasks, using the English content from class to complete homework tasks, connecting newly learned English to existing knowledge, engaging in discussions with deep probing
Generic/ employability skills	Completing these tasks in their group (incorporating delivery skills and discovery skills), completing critical-thinking tasks, being a leader during group work

In all the cases above, the goal would be for me to try to either maximize or minimize each aspect through providing guidance and opportunities (in part through the class handouts) and support (when the learners were using the handouts), and through trying to change my teacher cognition (e.g., my beliefs) and my behavior. Learners were also given a dedicated handout that listed what they should do during the course to be an "active learner" (e.g., actively participate, mainly use English, ask for help if needed, avoid engaging in off-task behavior, etc.). It was translated into Japanese and was given to learners in class three.

When deciding the course contents and components, I decided to include specific techniques in most classes to try to encourage active learning (as operationalized) (see Table 4).

Table 4
Techniques Included in Classes to Encourage Active Learning (as Operationalized)

Review activities for spelling, meaning, pronunciation, and conversations; these were sometimes in the form of language games)
Pre- and post-quiz completion (the aim was to help learners to assess their language skills before they studied using NetAcademy Next so as to encourage increased mental exertion while studying)
Speaking activities (pair work - e.g. information gap tasks; and group tasks - e.g. higher-order thinking tasks, a jigsaw task)
Learners being a leader during group tasks
Group feedback from the teacher that all learners wrote down
Learner self-reflection about their study during the class

For pre-implementation reflection, I reflected specifically about my teacher cognition and active learning. This was individual reflection conducted in a structured way. I mainly drew on Farrell (2018a) and Burns (2010) to inform these reflections. During this reflection, I responded to multiple questions suggested by the authors, including about my beliefs. These reflections showed some awareness of what I did not know about the learners ("I am not always aware of how they like to learn") and the reason ("I do not always try to ascertain this information at the beginning of a course"), and what I knew about myself and what I thought I needed to change to facilitate implementation ("sometimes I prioritize getting stuff done rather than having proper class pacing"). Table 5 lists the beliefs that I discovered I had.

Table 5
Beliefs I Had (That Were Relevant to an Implementation of Active Learning)

I believed that… ● …it was important to help learners to develop their speaking skills. ● …I should be understanding about learner absences or lateness. ● …I should be a facilitator in the classroom. ● …the learners enjoyed playing language games. ● …I always provided a positive learning environment for my learners. ● …Japanese learners may like to be managed.

At this point in the implementation, it seemed essential to be aware of the above and try to finalize my pre-implementation planning so it was taken into account.

Research Cycle 2

My overall goal during research cycles two and three was to make changes to the course so that how it was being conducted was more in line with my operationalization of active learning.

Research Cycle 2 took place during weeks one to nine. It was divided into two parts: weeks one to four and weeks five to nine. Data collection and analysis conducted during weeks one to four helped to inform formulation of the action plan to be implemented from class five. The observation of the video recording was conducted out of class by my critical friend and me. We conducted the observation separately (i.e., we were both alone when we did so to ensure that we did not influence each other's perceptions of the in-class events). My critical friend was a fellow teacher in the same teaching context who agreed to observe the video recording of class two and provide observations/feedback based on the operationalization. Our observations indicated many of the changes that would need to be made.

First, some of my in-class behaviors could have been limiting learner engagement. For example, I spoke too much Japanese at times. My critical friend also pointed out that I used foreigner talk (e.g., instead of saying "take a photo", I started saying "take photo") when short on time. Further, some learners did not appear to understand all instructions given. Second, learner talk time needed to be increased. Third, the design of a group task I provided did not promote enough use of the L2. Fourth, not all learners were self-regulating / there was off-task behavior (e.g., at least one was using their phone for off-task purposes). Fifth, I was not providing enough guidance for group work, such as English that learners could use during group work to maximize their use of the L2 (e.g., "What do you think, Miwa?"), or support while learners were engaging in it.

Learner completion of the mini-questionnaires (task engagement and leadership) during this period indicated that overall the learners did not find the group task I provided interesting or challenging enough, that they had needed more skills and help to complete the task, and that they did not really like being a leader during group work or feel effective when doing so (see Appendices A and B). During the semi-structured interviews with the learners, one (participant 2I) asked that I include more English from NetAcademy Next in follow-up speaking activities (participant codes such as this one refer to individual students in the course; to access the data for individual participants, follow the link in Appendix C to the audit trail). All learners interviewed indicated that they wanted to do more speaking activities during class time.

Review of learners' handouts focusing on peer feedback indicated that I would need to provide more guidance for peer feedback giving. Review of learners' homework portfolios indicated that some learners were not completing their homework as expected (i.e., they were not writing the full twenty words for each task or submitting it on time). Audio recordings of learners' pair work conversations indicated that I needed to provide English that learners could use during pair work to maximize their use of the L2 (e.g., "How do you say ____ in English?"). In the extract below, when the learner asked "*sanjyuudo te nan to iu, eigo de*?", she was asking how to say "30 degrees" in English.

(Learners 1B and 1I)
11 A: there is season in japan. the summer is very hot recently. the temperature is almost sanjuudo or more. sanjyuudo te nan to iu, eigo de?
12 B: sanjyuudo
13 A: celcius
14 B: iya, futsuu ni degrees
15 A: degrees. 30 degrees or more. 30 degrees or more. thank you.

Based on all of the above, I formulated the following action plan, and aimed to make the updates to the course from class five (see Table 6).

Table 6
The Action Plan

Speak less Japanese (the teacher and the learners), don't use foreigner talk, and give simple, clear instructions
Encourage learners to write the full twenty words in their homework portfolio and submit it on time
Provide more speaking activities at various points in a class to encourage more interaction in the L2
Provide more guidance for what learners should do when using NetAcademy Next to encourage self-regulation (e.g., ignore distractions, etc.)
Include more English from NetAcademy Next units in follow-up activities to facilitate deep learning
Better design the pair and group tasks so that they will facilitate more L2 use
Better design the group tasks so that they are more challenging and interesting to learners (at least reconsider the topics), better design that section of the handout so that it better prepares learners to complete the task, and provide more help
Provide English that learners can use to maximize their use of the L2 during pair work (e.g., "How do you say ____ in English?") and group work (e.g. "What do you think, Miwa?")
Provide more support for pair and group work (including learners' efforts to be a leader), and provide guidance for and English that learners can use when filling the role of leader during group work
Provide guidance and English that learners can use when engaging in peer feedback (e.g., "Next time, …")

I tried to achieve this either by changing my own behavior in class or by updating the class handout that I provided to learners in most classes.

Data collection and analysis conducted during weeks five to nine indicated that some positive change had been achieved as a result of implementing the action plan. The data collected indicated that I had increased opportunities for learners to use the L2 (e.g., during pair work) and learners' L2 use had increased. I also spoke mainly in English and my instructions were clearer. I was also providing more support for pair and group work. I was providing more guidance for how learners could self-regulate during their use of NetAcademy Next. I was providing improved pair and group tasks, more guidance for how learners could fill the role of leader during group work, and English that learners could use when filling that role. I was also including more English from NetAcademy Next units in review activities in an attempt to facilitate deep learning. I decided to keep working on any remaining issues.

Data collection and analysis during this time also helped to inform formulation of the updated action plan to be implemented from class ten. An entry in my teaching log/journal indicated that I believed that class five seemed to be too "busy" (i.e., there seemed to be too many activities to complete). My observation of the video recording of that class indicated that at least one learner was not self-regulating (e.g., she was using her phone for off-task purposes when using NetAcademy). I therefore provided specific guidance about this at the beginning of class six. I asked the learners to make predictions about the NetAcademy unit topic by looking at the unit picture, to take a note of any new English as they studied the unit, to ignore distractions as they studied, and to review after finishing studying the unit.

Review of learners' handouts focusing on peer feedback during this period indicated that I would need to provide more guidance for peer feedback giving (learner responses when completing Questionnaire 2 confirmed this to some extent). That said, review of learners' peer feedback giving after class nine (using their audio recordings and

their handouts) indicated that some learners' peer feedback giving ability had increased. Other data collected at this time indicated that I would have to provide learners with individual strategic thinking time to encourage increased L2 use during group work. It was also clear that I would need to continue working on several other issues, including those related to learners' homework.

Based on the above, I formulated the following updated action plan, and aimed to make the updates to the course from class ten (see Table 7).

Table 7
The Updated Action Plan

Provide support for pair and group work (and English that learners can use to maximize their use of the L2), encourage learners to write the full 20 words for their homework tasks and submit their homework on time
Have learners put their smart-phones in their bags before using NetAcademy Next to try to prevent off-task behavior
Provide a self-report section for learners to indicate how they self-regulated before, during, and after use of NetAcademy Next
Make each class less busy - e.g., by having learners do listening steps 1–4 only in NetAcademy next (and not steps 5–6)
Provide strategic planning time for group work to maximize English use and help make the course less difficult (and make other adjustments to the class handout for the same reason)
Provide guidance and English that learners can use when engaging in peer feedback, as well as more support

As before, I tried to achieve this either by changing my own behavior or by updating the class handout that I provided learners in most classes.

Research Cycle 3

Data collection and analysis conducted during week eleven indicated that some positive change had been achieved as a result of implementing the updated action plan. The classroom observation indicated that I was maintaining previous improvements. Some issues remained, however. First, some learners still lacked the ability to self-regulate to the extent expected during class time (e.g., few appeared to review after finishing using NetAcademy, and there was chatting in Japanese during their use of the application). That said, it was difficult to determine to what extent some of what I perceived to be off-task behavior was actually off-task. Second, the learners completed the mini-questionnaires again in class twelve. Their perceptions of the class twelve group task were not significantly different to those of the class two group task (see Appendix A). Further, the learners continued to not like being a leader during group work (see Appendix B). That said, they did indicate feeling more effective. Third, I believe that at least one of my classes during this period was too "busy". In addition, some of the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted during this period were a surprise to me. For example, they indicated differing preferences in regards to things such as their desire to speak to a native speaker (the teacher) or their classmates during speaking activities (participants 1E, 1F, 1P) (though there had been mention of this earlier in the implementation), how NetAcademy Next should be used (1D, 1E, 1F, 1P, 2H, 2L), and what my role in policing their use of the L1 should be (1F, 2W, 2X). Ideally, I should have been more aware of such preferences earlier on in the implementation.

Did I improve?

As noted earlier, after completing research cycle three, I conducted a latent content analysis. I used that to inform my reflections about the overall implementation

and my teacher cognition. Based on that reflection, it would appear that a range of positive changes related to my teacher cognition and my teaching practice were achieved (see Table 8).

Table 8
Positive Changes Related to My Teacher Cognition and My Teaching Practice

Teacher Cognition
• I increased the extent of my practical knowledge (i.e., knowledge about learners' needs, goals, preferences, abilities, and anxieties) • In line with the above, some beliefs changed, e.g., I had believed that the learners enjoyed playing language games; however, they actually wanted to engage in more regular L2 speaking activities (i.e., information-gap tasks) instead • Some beliefs were elaborated, e.g., I had believed that it was important to help learners to develop their speaking skills; however, data collection indicated more fully why it is important • I became more aware of the impact of my teacher cognition on my teaching practice
Teaching Practice
By the end of the implementation, I was… • using less Japanese • not using foreigner talk (or was quickly self-correcting) • providing improved instructions in English • providing more L2 speaking activities for learners in line with both the operationalization and learner expectations • noticing that learner talk time had increased • including more English from NetAcademy Next in follow-up activities on the class handout • providing more support for pair and group work, as well as guidance and English that learners could use when filling the role of leader during group work • providing more English that learners could use to maximize their use of the L2 during pair work (e.g., "How do you say ____ in English?") and group work (e.g. "What do you think, Miwa?") • providing strategic planning time for group work to maximize English use and make the course less difficult (and including simpler activities for the same reason) • providing improved guidance and English that learners could use when engaging in peer feedback, as well as more support

Several issues remained at the end. First, I had the perception that I sometimes prioritized achieving a lot in a class over proper pacing. This is not something that had changed in a positive direction by the end of the implementation. Second, my ability to design engaging group tasks appeared to be still somewhat limited. Third, my ability to encourage all learners to self-regulate when using NetAcademy Next (and during class time generally) and complete their homework as expected remained limited. Fourth, only some learners had improved their ability to give peer feedback to the extent expected by the end of the implementation.

Discussion

Whether or Not to Implement

Many teachers and researchers may perceive English-language courses to already be "active" (e.g., Alves, 2015; Jones & Palmer, 2017; McMurry, 2018). Further, teachers already implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) may question if their operationalization of CLT already incorporates aspects of active learning. This makes sense given that some widely adopted conceptualizations of CLT include aspects that could be considered "active" (see Brown & Lee, 2015; Richards, 2006). According to Brown and Lee (2015), for example, CLT includes a focus on learners being "active participants in their own learning process" (p. 32). As expected, the extent to which one's courses could be considered to already be "active" would depend on one's operationalization of active learning (or CLT) and the extent to which one is implementing the different aspects of it. This points to the need for English-language teachers to at least re-evaluate their teaching. My own decision to do this, and to implement active learning, led to a positive change in my teacher cognition and my teaching practice.

Operationalizing Active Learning for ELT

When we compare the results of the current implementation to that of others (see Caine, 2020; Ishikawa, 2016; Jones & Palmer, 2017; Mack, 2010; Montero-Fleta, 2012; Verma, 2011; Waluyo, 2020), both similarities and differences can be seen. One similarity relates to operationalizing the approach. How active learning has been operationalized depends on the individual teacher and their teaching context. This also holds true for the current implementation. Two of the main differences concern the comprehensiveness of the operationalization and the number and type of approaches, techniques, and strategies included. In regards to the comprehensiveness of the operationalization, other researchers have not sought to focus on and try to achieve change with the number of aspects that were focused on in the current study. That makes sense because, in my case, such a wide-ranging focus made the overall process difficult and time-consuming. That said, it could be argued that one's operationalization should be as comprehensive as possible without making it fall out of alignment with the specific course type, the course objectives, or the specific teaching context. There is no reason, however, that teachers need to focus on trying to change so many aspects of their teaching practice at once. In regards to approaches, techniques, and strategies, some of the authors cited above used some very creative and potentially engaging ones as part of their implementations, e.g., having learners create a how-to video in English (Caine, 2020) or having learners do research about a topic, fill out a brief sheet, and then present it using English to their group in the following class (Jones & Palmer, 2017). This shows that one must focus as much on the development or sourcing of such supporting techniques as on formulating an optimal operationalization. This is essential since such techniques not only serve a specific aspect of the operationalization and help the teacher to improve in regards to that aspect, but they may also serve to limit learners' resistance to the implementation generally.

Learner-Related Issues

A number of learner-related issues complicated the current implementation. Here I will mention two. First, it was found that some learners had certain beliefs, attitudes, and/or preferences which were not in line with the operationalization. For example, data collection quite late in the implementation indicated that two learners wanted to speak English mainly with me (a native speaker) rather than their classmates. This would appear to reflect one finding by Yonesaka and Tanaka (2013). In their study, a majority of the participants indicated believing that their achieving progress could be most readily facilitated by communicating with native speakers. Part of one's goal during an implementation of active learning is to encourage change in learners' beliefs related to such issues. To do so, one must elicit learners' thinking about these things early in the implementation and then make repeated attempts to encourage change in their thinking. Unfortunately, I did not do this enough. What is also clear from the results is that achieving the required change with learners' beliefs, attitudes, preferences, and behaviors may not be achievable during one implementation. This calls for a longer-term and collaborative effort to achieve this.

Second, it appears that some learners in the current study were not ready to self-regulate to the extent required. According to Nakata (2010), this may result from learners' intrinsic motivation still being affectively self-regulated rather than cognitively self-regulated (or both). That is, they may still be at the stage where they are primarily externally motivated (e.g., by the teacher) and they may not be ready to manage themselves and their own learning. If one's operationalization of active learning includes a focus on learner self-regulation and the learners are not ready, then

achieving a successful implementation may be difficult. In both cases above, we can see the value of learning adequately about our learners even before operationalizing. This is the case since, while we should seek to encourage change, our efforts should be context-specific and learner-centered.

Reflection about Teacher Cognition

Research has shown that a teacher's cognition affects their teaching practice (Macalister, 2016; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Given this, it makes sense to reflect on one's cognition to minimize its negative impact on one's practice. The results of this study indicate that reflection about my teacher cognition was essential to the implementation process. As in many other studies (see Farrell, 2018b), the most positive overall change was an increase in awareness related to the impact of my teacher cognition on my teaching practice. Further, that increase resulted from reflection engaged in at the end of the implementation. This indicates that teachers who are implementing active learning (or CLT) may benefit from engaging in similar reflection about their teacher cognition. In my own case, for example, it was reflection about motives that led me to realize that the reason why my classes were "busy" was potentially a need to self-enhance (Mruk, 2006). That is, a need to see myself as competent (and potentially even superior) led me to design overly comprehensive class handouts. Doing this kind of reflection both before and after an implementation could help to raise teachers' awareness of aspects of their teacher cognition that must change. It is also important to keep in mind, however, that achieving a positive change with all such aspects will not be achievable during one implementation, and it would therefore need to be the focus of ongoing efforts to change.

Having a Critical Friend

Having a critical friend was essential early on in the current implementation. As noted earlier, this was a fellow teacher in the same teaching context who agreed to observe a video recording of me teaching and provide observations/feedback based on the operationalization. This revealed several things about my in-class behavior that I was not aware of and which could have potentially negatively impacted the implementation; for example, I was using foreigner talk when short on time. These things could have negatively impacted learner engagement, the maximization of which was central to my operationalization. That said, this can be a particularly difficult part of such a process because of the feedback given and/or how it is given. Previous research has shown that some teachers may not like being observed (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011). Given this, such teachers may prefer instead to observe their own teaching and critically evaluate it as part of their own reflective process. In such a case, however, one's literature review would need to be sufficiently extensive, and when observing oneself, one would need to be sufficiently critical with oneself.

Conclusion

MEXT has been recommending for some time that active learning be implemented in tertiary-level courses in Japan. This article has reported on one implementation of active learning in an English-language course within Japanese tertiary education through an action-research process. As a result of going through the process, I (the lead author) increased my awareness of the ways in which my teaching needed to change, and some positive change was achieved with both my teacher cognition and my teaching practice. Therefore, the recommendation by MEXT to implement active learning in this context had a positive impact on me. It is therefore hoped that this article may inform and help other teachers who are considering implementing or are required to implement the approach.

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Appendix A

Post-Group Task Engagement Mini-Questionnaire

A significant difference was not found between the results for class two (Mdn=5.000) and class twelve (Mdn=5.290) on the task engagement mini-questionnaire (n=31, w=288.000, p=0.054). To conduct this analysis, I firstly checked the normality of the distributions of both data sets in JASP. The results indicated that there was a deviation from normality. I therefore decided to conduct a Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Table A1

	Class 2			Class 12		
	Me.	Mo.	St.	Me.	Mo.	St.
	/7	/7		/7	/7	
This task was interesting to me.	5.32	5.00	1.40	5.58	5.00	1.29
I was challenged by this task.	4.48	4.00	1.46	4.74	4.00	1.15
I understood the rules for this task.	5.36	6.00	1.45	5.65	6.00	1.23
I had the skills to complete this task.	4.87	4.00	1.28	5.36	6.00	1.17
I received the help that I needed to do this task.	4.84	4.00	1.44	4.81	5.00	1.35
I will use the things I learned in this task outside of the classroom.	5.13	5.00	1.38	5.45	5.00	1.23
I have confidence I can do this task well in the future.	5.26	5.00	1.26	5.39	5.00	1.33

(Me. = mean, Mo. = mode, St. = Standard deviation)

Appendix B

Leadership Mini-Questionnaire

A significant difference was found between the results for class two and class twelve regarding their sense of effectiveness (n=37, t(36)=2.915), p=0.006; Cohen's d=0.479), with a small to medium effect size. However, a significant difference was not found regarding the extent to which they liked being a leader (n=37, t(36)=1.960), p=0.058). To conduct this analysis, I firstly checked the normality of the distributions of both data sets in JASP. I then conducted a normality check. The results indicated that there was not a deviation from normality. I therefore decided to conduct a Student's t-test.

Table B1

	Class 2			Class 12		
Item	Mean	Mode	Stand. Dev.	Mean	Mode	Stand. Dev.
	/7	/7		/7	/7	
I like being a leader during group work.	3.30	4.00	1.31	3.76	3.00	1.36
During group work, I'm an effective leader.	2.89	2.00	1.39	3.68	3.00	1.42

Appendix C
The Audit Trail

The audit trail can be accessed here:
https://1drv.ms/u/s!AsTuUBjep-eGh951qYRiS5Ai0A3TTg?e=XPR4JB

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Experiences of English Teachers with Chronic Illness in Japan

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Research into teachers with visible physical disabilities and some forms of hidden disability, such as learning disabilities, has increased in recent years (Evans et al., 2017). However, the experiences of teachers with chronic illness remain under-represented in academic literature despite the increasing prevalence of chronic illness among teachers (Brown & Leigh, 2018). This qualitative study aims to explore the effects of chronic illness on foreign English language teachers' working lives in Japan. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with four foreign English teachers and underwent deductive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2012) and Smith and Osborn (2015). The findings show that participants avoided disclosing their illness as much as possible due to fear of others' reactions, choosing mainly to disclose to management and a few selected, trusted colleagues and students. The data also reveal that chronic illness affected the participants' work in other ways, such as their attendance and in-class actions.

Chronic illness (also known as invisible illness) is defined as "a long-term health condition that persists over time, has recurring (often 'invisible') symptoms, and requires long-term medical intervention" (Goodwin & Morgan, 2012, para. 2). Arthritis, Crohn's disease, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, epilepsy, fibromyalgia, and multiple sclerosis are just a few examples of chronic illness. The symptoms of chronic illness can vary from person to person and even from day to day for the same person, and the symptoms are usually invisible (Goodwin & Morgan, 2012).

Chronic illness is becoming increasingly prevalent among teachers around the world (Brown & Leigh, 2018), and although there has been more research into the experiences of teachers with visible physical disabilities and some forms of hidden disability (Evans et al, 2017), as yet there is only a small body of research detailing the experiences of teachers with chronic illness in academia, and none in English on the experiences of teachers with chronic illness in Japan. This study explores the lived experiences of foreign English language teachers with chronic illness in Japan through thematic analysis of interviews with four teachers. It examines the effects of chronic illness on teachers' working lives, in particular the issues regarding disclosure and workload.

Chronic Illness

Bury (1982) posits that chronic illness constitutes a form of biographical disruption, whereby the individual's life, routines, and identity are disrupted by their illness. However, the biographical disruption is not necessarily constant; rather, the individual eventually comes to terms with their illness and constructs a new biography or identity for themselves (Brown, 2018b).

The term "chronic illness" is rendered in Japanese as 難病 (*nanbyō*). *Byō* signifies "illness," while *nan* carries a negative nuance, as it is also the stem of the adjective *muzukashii* (difficult). In official contexts *nanbyō* is translated as "intractable," as in the name of the Japan Intractable Diseases Information Center. The English word "intractable" also conveys a negative meaning of being hard to deal with or control, in contrast to the term "chronic illness," in which the word "chronic" denotes

ongoing or long-term, and is more neutral in meaning.

It is impossible to know the precise number of people with a diagnosed chronic illness in Japan, but statistics from the Japan Intractable Diseases Information Center (2021) show that in 2019 there were 946,110 people in receipt of special medical benefits for chronic illness in Japan. Not everyone who is diagnosed with a chronic illness is eligible for the benefits, and not everyone who is diagnosed with a chronic illness applies for the benefits, therefore those people are not included in the statistics. People with undiagnosed chronic illnesses are also not included. Furthermore, there is no data to show the employment status of those claiming the medical benefits, so it is unclear how many are employed in education.

Society's expectations of individuals are that they are "healthy and productive members of society" (Stevens, 2013, p. 1). Consequently, those who are not able-bodied are "othered" (Stevens, 2013, p. 1) and often marginalised or rendered an outsider. This is often the case in Japan, where Shiobara (2020) notes that social division is an integral part of modern Japanese society. Several decades ago "those who suffer certain kinds of illness or damage [were] regarded as marginal and potentially polluting in Japanese society" (Valentine, 1990, p. 29). In a country such as Japan, which is considered by many to be homogeneous, a difference such as disability "disrupts the cultural norms" and the person with disability is shunned by society (Heyer, 2015, p. 156). Heyer (2015) adds that for many years, people with disabilities in Japan have rarely been visible in public. Heyer (2015) explains that people with disabilities in Japan are often segregated, patronised and/or infantilised, and constantly faced with an expectation that they "be conscious of the 'burden' (*meiwaku*) they impose on others" just by existing (p. 156).

In many cases, disability—and by extension chronic illness—has been ignored rather than explicitly commented on in Japan (Stevens, 2013). Stevens (2013) explains that in Japanese society, silence and "euphemisms" are common ways of avoiding directly acknowledging the differences between people with and without disabilities (p. 45). Stevens (2013) also notes the use of "problematic language" with regard to people with chronic illness (p. 54). However, Shiobara (2020) adds that phrases such as "disabled people only bring misery" became prominent after a high-profile mass murder at a residential facility for people with disabilities, and that such language can influence even members of the public who do not necessarily hold extreme views on the subject (p. 13). As a result, the marginalisation of people with disabilities is compounded.

Choosing to disclose a chronic illness that reveals oneself not to be "able-bodied" leaves the individual open to "the complexities of identifying as 'disabled'" (Griffiths, 2020, p. 129). Beatty (2012) argues that "illness is a shared, intersubjective, and social experience" as it affects not only the person with the illness but also those with whom they interact (p. 92). The perceptions and reactions of co-workers influence the working lives of teachers with chronic illness, often negatively.

Positionality

Qualitative research often foregrounds the importance of objectivity on the part of the researcher; however, it is impossible for humans to be completely objective. As such, every person carries "biases, preoccupations and assumptions" (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 6). Since "qualitative research is subjective" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 15), within the context of certain types of qualitative research, these biases can be used to the researcher's advantage by reflecting on their influence on the study.

I am a white British male with a chronic illness working as a teacher in Japan. My chronic illness was a major factor in deciding to conduct this study, and my own experiences of chronic illness meant that I was able to empathise closely with the participants. My status as a teacher in Japan with a chronic illness gave me an insider perspective, and disclosing my illness to the participants during the interviews helped to build a rapport. I enjoyed a pre-existing relationship with two of the participants, which may have affected their demeanour and willingness to reveal more of themselves when answering. The study deals with a sensitive topic, so at the start of each interview I reiterated the participants' right to refuse to answer any questions, and I reconfirmed their consent at the beginning and end of each interview.

Disclosure

Issues surrounding disclosure occur frequently in the literature on teachers with chronic illness. People with chronic illness can choose to "disclose, pass or conceal" (Brown, 2020, p. 60). Stevens (2013) states that the "socially marginalised" in Japan often choose to pass as non-disabled, due to the perception among people without disabilities that people with disabilities "are treated like second-class citizens" (p. 32). For many people with chronic illness, the decision to pass as able-bodied or disclose one's condition is difficult. The stigma around chronic illness has been well-documented (Goodwin & Morgan, 2012; Stevens 2013; Valentine, 1990). Therefore, by disclosing an illness, the individuals may feel that they are leaving themselves open to a variety of negative reactions and judgements from others in the workplace. Negative reactions can range from a lack of empathy (Bassler, 2009), disbelief that they truly are ill (Finkelstein, 2018), and discriminatory comments or actions from others (Joritz-Nakagawa, 2018; Leigh & Brown, 2020; Newton et al., 2018), to the more extreme example of threats of job loss (Joritz-Nakagawa, 2018). It is not just others who may display negativity towards the chronically ill, as the stigma can be internalised by the individual with chronic illness, and they may worry about the possible perception that others will have of them "seeming unable to do the job" (Beretz, 2003).

Support groups are an option for the marginalised, particularly those who are not able or do not want to pass or conceal. Valentine (1990) explains that belonging to a group is important for individuals in Japanese society, therefore some individuals who are excluded from certain aspects or areas of society find a sense of belonging by forming or joining a support group. By joining a support group, they may be able to reduce their outsider status, in addition to receiving the support that they need from others in similar situations.

However, opting to conceal one's illness or pass as able-bodied instead of disclosing one's condition does not avoid all negative situations. Brown (2020) warns of the risk of a "toxic" situation and "emotional pain" when the chronically ill individual feels pressure "to manage and control information" (p. 70). By concealing their illness, the individual may experience high levels of stress and anxiety, for example of being discovered and outed in front of others (Goodwin & Morgan, 2012; Valentine, 1990). While passing is a legitimate strategy employed successfully by many chronically ill teachers, its long-term viability is uncertain (Ellingson, 2021; Lewis, 2021). Concealing chronic illness, like disclosing, can have a negative impact on the individuals' career, as a dip in the quality or timeliness of their work may not be understood by others (Newton et al., 2018).

Workload

The education sector is widely acknowledged as a highly competitive field that prizes those who overwork (Leigh &

Brown, 2020). Furthermore, the field is increasingly being recognised as ableist, in that it assumes all workers are "able-bodied and able-minded until proven otherwise" (Andrews, 2020, p. 106). The pressure to overwork can have negative consequences even for workers without chronic illness. In Japan, particularly in "white-collar professions…working late is considered a badge of pride [and] a sign of how essential that worker really is to the organisation" (Zielenziger, 2006, p. 205). In many Japanese schools, teachers are expected to work long hours with extracurricular duties in addition to their regular classes (Tsuboya-Newell, 2018), which carries a risk of psychological distress and burnout (Bannai et al., 2015). This is corroborated by data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2021), which show that 5,478 teachers took leave for mental health reasons in 2019. This constitutes the highest number ever recorded and the third consecutive annual increase.

For those with chronic illness, the "heroic stamina" required to keep up with the pressure to overwork can be debilitating (Beretz, 2003). Brown (2021) highlights the "sense of failure many academics experience because they cannot meet expectations placed upon them" (p. 1). In the *eikaiwa* (private conversation school) industry, Taylor (2017; 2020) found that teachers in national *eikaiwa* chains experienced infringements on their personal time by their employers, through being asked to travel what they thought were unreasonable distances to work at other branches, and by their schedules being changed at short notice. One manager interviewed in Taylor (2020) described his long workdays and working on his days off and outside his scheduled working hours. These situations led the teachers to feel irritated and angry, but they were able to cope. For teachers with chronic illness, such situations could become impossible to work in and create feelings such as those described by Beretz (2003).

Another effect of passing on the chronically ill teacher is the increased likelihood of being denied the accommodations they need to overcome "structural impediments" and enable them to carry out their work (Beretz, 2003). Many feel that the pressure to overwork that is endemic in education forces them to overextend themselves in order to achieve to the same level as colleagues without illnesses (Bassler, 2009; Ellingson, 2021; Leigh & Brown, 2020). This situation further damages the teacher with chronic illness as they are often denied accommodations on the basis of their achievements without them (Ellingson, 2021), which creates a vicious circle (Ellingson, 2021; Finkelstein, 2018). However, chronic illness does not necessarily negate productivity. Bassler's (2009) participants included some who had made adjustments by themselves to increase their work output and quality, thereby making them more productive than many of their co-workers without chronic illness. Similarly, Brown (2018a) compiled a list of strategies used by teachers with chronic illness to cope with work and life in education.

Teachers with chronic illness face difficult decisions regarding disclosing or concealing their illness or passing as not ill, and whichever they choose can have negative consequences. Additionally, the nature of education in Japan and academia in general means that they face pressure to overwork, which can have a deleterious impact on illness. This study aims to contribute to an under-researched aspect of the teacher experience in Japan, as no similar studies could be identified during preliminary research.

Methodology

Participants

Participants for this study were a convenience sample found through messages posted in online groups for English speakers in Japan, special interest groups of the Japan Association for Language

Teaching, and to colleagues and contacts in the teaching profession. I knew two of the participants prior to the study. All participants gave their informed consent in writing to participate in the study, and their consent was given again orally at the beginning and end of the interview. The participants all had diagnosed chronic illnesses and were employed as English teachers in Japan at the time of the interviews in May, 2021. Thus, they were a small, purposive, largely homogeneous sample, which is ideal for a study of this nature (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The participants' information is summarised in Table 1. Their specific illnesses have not been named in this paper for two reasons. Firstly, to protect the participants' anonymity. Secondly, as with Sheppard (2021), the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of teachers with chronic illness more generally, rather than as they relate to specific chronic illnesses.

Table 1
Participants

Name	Gender	Age range	Position
Participant A	Male	30-39	*Eikaiwa* teacher and owner
Participant B	Male	40-49	*Eikaiwa* teacher
Participant C	Female	20-29	ALT (high school)
Participant D	Female	30-39	ALT (primary school)

Instrument

I developed an interview schedule based on the literature and a sample schedule used with a dialysis patient from Smith and Osborn (2015). As with the sample schedule, I grouped questions according to pertinent themes that arose from the literature on chronic illness in education, and then ordered them so the more sensitive questions were later in the interview. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews due to the leeway they allow me as the researcher to adapt questions based on the participant's responses. Additionally, semi-structured interviews offer participants the space to give more wide-ranging answers.

Data Collection and Analysis

This was a qualitative study. Interviews took place over Zoom, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I sent each participant their transcript to confirm its accuracy with them. I analysed the data thematically, using the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2012) in addition to Smith and Osborn's (2015) suggested approach for analysing semi-structured interview data. I coded by hand, highlighting and assigning latent, descriptive codes to relevant passages of the transcripts. I then copied those excerpts into a new document for each participant. This allowed me to collate the data for the main themes. Four main clustered themes were identified at that stage, and these were further coded into two main themes.

Findings and Discussion

During analysis, data were collated and organised according to the two overarching themes seen in the literature review above: disclosure and workload. In this section I will show the data related to each of those themes.

Disclosure

Disclosure to students

Brown (2020) notes that individuals with chronic illness have to decide whether to "disclose, pass or conceal" (p.60). All four participants in this study expressed a general reluctance to disclose their illness at work, but found that by disclosing to a select few, they were able to receive some support, although not without some difficulties as they

navigated the "shared, intersubjective, and social experience" of illness with others in the workplace (Beatty, 2012, p. 92). With regards to disclosing to students, the participants' reluctance was due to the young age of most of the students, which would make it "hard" (Participant D) and would lead to embarrassment (Participant C). Participant C concealed her illness, but noted that on one occasion when she worked while wearing a visible sign of her illness (in this case, a bandage), students were "really nosy about it like pointing it out and whispering to each other in a really noticeable way," which caused her discomfort. Participant C was able to conceal her illness most days, but when she had a flare up and needed to wear a bandage, she drew attention to her hitherto concealed illness and increased her anxiety about others knowing about her illness. This supports Goodwin and Morgan's (2012) assertion that attempting to conceal can lead to the fear of being discovered.

Participants did disclose their illness to some students, however. Participant B disclosed his illness to three students, one adult and two children, because he felt "comfortable in front of them." The adult student worked in medicine and had noticed Participant B's condition fluctuate according to the state of his illness, while the young students also experienced ongoing medical issues. Participant D was also forced to disclose to a group of adult students at a previous workplace after acquiring visible illness-related injuries. Participant A's illness was disclosed to all students at his workplace by a manager without his prior knowledge or consent, a situation with which he was displeased: "if he [the manager] asked me it's fine. I mean I still wouldn't want him to." Participant A explained that he believed the manager's rationale for doing so was to remove any concerns among students that he had caught COVID-19. Participant A's phrasing casts doubt onto whether he really did think it was "fine," and suggests that he felt "emotional pain" forecast by Brown (2020, p. 70) regarding the loss of control of personal information. However, Participant A went on to explain that he would have disclosed to certain students if he knew that they had the same illness as him so that he could "make a connection" with them. This seems to show that Participant A recognises the importance of support groups as explained by Valentine (1990).

Despite their reluctance to disclose to students, three of the participants did so and found that students' reactions were mostly positive, ranging from sympathetic and understanding (Participant A), "fine with it" (Participant B), and "interested" (Participant D). In terms of negative reactions, only Participant A perceived embarrassment from some students who did not comment on his illness when most others did, which is reminiscent of Stevens' (2013) reporting of silence around issues of disability and illness in Japanese society, as those who do not know what to say often choose to say nothing at all. However, in most of the participants' cases, the reactions of students suggest that when they did so, disclosing to students was a positive experience overall, which supports similar findings by Newton et al. (2018).

Disclosure to colleagues

The participants also elected not to disclose to most of their colleagues. The exception was Participant A, whose illness was disclosed to colleagues on his behalf. Participants B, C and D elected to disclose their illness to one current colleague. Participants C and D explained that they disclosed to a fellow ALT. Participant C did so because she found the relationship between ALTs to be "really intense…in terms of just disclosing like everything about yourself," whereas Participant D felt that she needed to when her co-worker encountered her stretching awkwardly at work. These are examples of the "awkward social interactions" of which Goodwin and Morgan (2012, para. 9) warn. Participant B said that

"getting a support group together is kind of difficult because people don't wanna be exposed," but by choosing to disclose to a trusted co-worker, the participants seemed to feel that they had at least someone to whom they could rely on and "vent to a limited extent" (Participant C).

Participant B was the only interviewee to have encountered conflict with a colleague due to his illness. He told the story of a Japanese co-worker who, upon seeing Participant B's medicine on his desk, "grabbed it and waved it around in the air and said 'what's this are you sick or something?'" Participant B was "pissed off" and "angry," but the conflict reached a swift resolution as the co-worker apologised to the manager, who had heard the exchange. Participant B said that he did not receive a direct apology, but that he was happy to let the incident go. However, the fact that Participant B still remembers the incident and the way he felt clearly, and the fact that he was worried that other colleagues would experience the same humiliation, suggests that it had a profound effect on him. There are several possible interpretations of this incident. One is that the co-worker's actions were a manifestation of socio-cultural differences, such as the idea of othering disabled people in Japanese society (Stevens, 2013), of illness being a pollutant (Valentine, 1990), or of having internalised exclusionist ideas regarding people with disabilities (Shiobara, 2020). For those reasons, it is therefore possible that the co-worker did not intend to humiliate Participant B or invade his privacy. The opposite is also true, however: the co-worker may have chosen those words, actions and setting in an attempt to maximise the potential for Participant B to be humiliated and his privacy to be invaded. It may also have been the case that the co-worker was being insensitive for other reasons.

From this episode, similar to Participants C and D working with visible signs of their illness, we can see that despite choosing to conceal with most people in the workplace, slight lapses can create the risk of being exposed as chronically ill (Goodwin & Morgan, 2012). These episodes also demonstrate the stress the participants felt trying "to manage and control information" (Brown, 2020, p. 70) about themselves.

Disclosure to management

All four participants disclosed their illness to management, either through choice or necessity. In Participant A's case, he needed to disclose his illness when he was hospitalised for several weeks upon diagnosis. Participant B disclosed to his manager because he knew the manager also experienced chronic illness and therefore it was easy to talk to him. This links to Valentine's (1990) explanation of the value of support groups, although in the case of Participant B, seeking support from someone in a similar situation was in addition to concealing his illness from most others in the workplace. Participant C explained that she had to disclose her illness early in her employment period because she did not have the Japanese language ability to attend medical appointments and needed help. Participant D also disclosed her illness when she began her current job, and did the same at her previous job at an *eikaiwa*, and had no qualms about doing so: "an employer OK like they need to know that this is a potential issue." All the participants received support from management in their current workplaces. Participant A's co-managers visited him in hospital, Participant B's manager gave him half a day of mental health leave when he asked for it, and Participants C and D noted that nobody took issue with them being ill.

However, Participants B and D talked about problems they had with previous employers after disclosure. Participant B quit a previous *eikaiwa* job after receiving persistent phone calls while hospitalised asking him to return to work. A lack of empathy is one of the possible negative

reactions noted by Bassler (2009) as a reason for non-disclosure. Participant D talked about the management at the *eikaiwa* that she worked in prior to becoming an ALT, where "face-to-face the reaction was fine but um my employer was discussing my health with my co-workers" and with some students "in detail" behind her back. She found this betrayal of trust "very upsetting." Participant D's situation demonstrates that she may have "opened [her]self to prejudice, ignorance and discrimination" (Leigh & Brown, 2020, p. 176), and it also shows that she was being othered by her managers and possibly by co-workers and students (Stevens, 2013). These unsavoury reactions from management show the risks associated with disclosing chronic illness to employers.

Overall, the participants opted to conceal rather than disclose their illness. Participants B and C both referred to the use of masks as aiding their attempts to conceal, as they were able to hide any true emotions that might show on their faces due to their illness. Participant B stated, "I barely show my students that I'm in pain and now that we have masks on all the time" he could conceal his illness more easily. Participant C explained that during a recent flare up she had been "quite emotional at work actually having a mask is great 'cause no one can see my facial expression." Participants also explicitly talked about their worries of being perceived negatively by others. Participant B acknowledged "there's a stigma" and said, "especially a chronic condition people tend to look down at you like you're weaker or something or at least that's what I feel," while Participant C explained in detail:

> I've been chronically ill my whole life. I don't think my thoughts towards chronically ill people are always very kind and I guess I project and I imagine people think I'm like a hypochondriac or weak.

This extract, along with Participant B's fears, suggests that the participants had internalised the stigma and "negative stereotypes" (Goodwin & Morgan, 2012, para. 9) around chronic illness to a significant extent, as they felt that others would see them as incapable of doing their job (Beretz, 2003). This internalised stigma subsequently influenced their decision to conceal in most cases rather than disclose their illness in the workplace, which in turn led to increased anxiety in some cases.

Workload

In class

Chronic illness impacted most of the participants' in-class actions. Participant A was the only interviewee who maintained that he did not experience a negative impact on his work as a result of his illness. Participant B said that during flare ups, he was "more of a wallflower than usual" and unable to move freely. He also spoke in detail about having developed a teaching style in which "students are able to operate without much influence," thereby making things "better for [his] students [and] easier for [him]self." The overall aim of this teaching style is not only to develop students' autonomy but also to ensure that his illness is not too disruptive to their learning. It also means that Participant B is able to ration his energy according to his workload on any given day: when he only has one class, he can expend more energy in it; on a day with several classes, he can use his energy in short bursts. Participant C explained that during flare ups it was "really difficult to walk around the classroom," which impinged on her ability to form relationships with students or monitor their work. Participant C also spoke of her need to leave the classroom to drink water, which she was able to do easily because of the presence of another teacher in her lessons. Participant D talked about the ways her illness restricted her physical movement when working in *eikaiwa*, which made teaching classes of young children

difficult. In her current position as an ALT, Participant D said her main challenge was not being able to participate in PE class or physically active games during break time. By refusing to participate when she feels unable to do so, Participant D is using one of the techniques listed by Brown (2018a).

Outside class

The participants were also affected at work outside class. Fatigue was mentioned as a factor by Participant C, who described "bouts of like just overwhelming fatigue" when she had "no choice but to rest [her] head on [her] desk." Participant D also described experiences of fatigue, and having to "go and work and work through the pain," which "is mentally and physically exhausting to deal with." She reiterated that she would often "just kinda push through it but that can be as I said mentally exhausting as well as physically exhausting." Another factor was physical pain. Participant C recounted a time when she was unable to hold a pen and therefore could not grade any papers for two weeks, compared to her usual rate of approximately 80 papers per day. Although she did not get into trouble for the sudden downturn in her work rate, there was a risk that Participant C could have been reprimanded had her employer noticed and taken action, as noted by Newton et al. (2018). Participants C and D both talked of having to leave the office frequently to stretch or do activities similar to yoga, which is listed by Brown (2018a) as a technique used by chronically ill teachers in the workplace. These participants showed that they were in a constant battle not to expend all their already depleted energy reserves (Beretz, 2003).

Schedule

Chronic illness affected all four participants' work schedule, mainly through increased instances of lateness or absence. Participant A needed to alter the schedule at his *eikaiwa* so that he could attend medical appointments on the same morning every week. Participant B talked about occasions when he had to cancel classes due to "emergency illness flare ups" or be absent from work to see a doctor. Participant C said that illness has caused her to miss "seven days of work at least partially or full days," due to symptoms of the illness or medical appointments. During flare ups, she said she was "late to work pretty often." Participant D explained that although she worked more hours as an ALT than in *eikaiwa*, she felt that she had more time as an ALT because of the more regular schedule. However, she said she occasionally had to miss work due to physical pain or illness-related injury.

As an extension of schedule, Participant D talked about the importance of routine to managing her illness, and how her work schedule was or was not conducive to a steady routine and actually led to her changing jobs. Maintaining a regular sleep and meal schedule was critical to managing her illness, but the nature of *eikaiwa* work meant that her class schedule differed from day to day, therefore her mealtimes and bedtime changed from one day to the next. Furthermore, she was often unable to make medical appointments that did not clash with work. As a result, she decided to search for new employment, as she explained: "part of the reason I changed jobs was um because of my health to have steady hours always the same so that my body could be in a routine." This tallies with the experiences of *eikaiwa* teachers in Taylor (2017; 2020), who found their schedule, and sudden changes to it, negatively affected their mental wellbeing and motivation. In the case of Participant D, working in an *eikaiwa* became untenable due to the schedule as well as the physical demands.

Pressure to overwork

Pressure to overwork was mentioned by two of the participants as one of the ways their illness and their work affected each other. Participant B explicitly mentioned that

"if [he is] team leader [he] can't show" when he experienced pain. He explained that "people see [him] as somebody who's very capable" and who "can do a lot," and said that he had "pushed it as much as [he] could and [he had] ended up in management positions." His phrasing suggests that these achievements were in spite of his illness, and his description of others' perception of him hints at self-doubt regarding whether he really is as capable as others think. Participant B's work ethic despite his chronic illness seems to support Bassler's (2009) claim that chronically ill teachers increase their work efforts to overcompensate for their illness. Participant B described himself as "stubborn" and reluctant to ask for help, while simultaneously being careful not to overburden himself or others by trying to take on too much work. Participant D, as mentioned above, explained that she often felt she had to work through fatigue or physical pain.

The pressure to overwork seems to have been internalised by the participants. They felt compelled to work harder to keep up with others, or to achieve more than colleagues without chronic illness, perhaps to show to themselves and others that their illness cannot hold them back. In addition to worsening a pre-existing illness, this course of action can negatively affect mental health.

Overall, the participants' chronic illness affected their work in a variety of ways. Participants did not widely disclose their illness, choosing instead to disclose to a small number of trusted colleagues and students with similar conditions. The participants did disclose to management, but mostly elected to conceal due to perceived stigma and worries about others' reactions, although they usually found that others were supportive when they did disclose. The participants also needed to miss work due to illness, injury, or medical appointments, in addition to feeling the effects of their condition in the classroom.

These findings seem to demonstrate that findings from similar studies outside Japan are present to some extent in the experiences of the participants in this study, who work in *eikaiwa* and primary and secondary education in Japan. This can be seen through Participants A and B recognising the value of finding support from others in similar situations, and through Participants C and D disclosing to fellow ALTs without chronic illness. Participant B's experience of a negative reaction from a co-worker is similar to findings in Leigh & Brown (2021) and Newton et al. (2018), as well as the experience of Joritz-Nakagawa (2018). Participant C's fear of being exposed as chronically ill is reminiscent of findings from Goodwin and Morgan (2012).

These examples show that although chronic illness is experienced differently by each individual, and indeed can be experienced differently by the same individual from one day to the next, many aspects of the experiences of teachers with chronic illness in Japan are not specific to the Japanese context.

Limitations

This study has limitations. The participants were a self-selecting convenience sample, which meant they had higher motivation to participate. This may reflect higher motivation in general, and as such the study does not show the experiences of chronically ill teachers with lower motivation. As stated above, I already knew two of the participants, which may have influenced their answers in the interviews. The participants were all white, "native speakers" of English, which means the experiences of teachers of other races with chronic illness, or those who are not seen as "native speakers" of English, are not represented. My positionality, as a foreign teacher with chronic illness in Japan, may also have affected the data collection and analysis. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study sheds valuable light on an

under-investigated section of the foreign teacher cohort in Japan.

Conclusion

This qualitative study investigated the experiences of foreign English teachers with chronic illness in Japan. The data showed that participants were generally reluctant to disclose their illness to others in the workplace, but did disclose to management, often out of necessity, and to a small number of trusted colleagues and occasionally students as a way of gaining support from others in similar situations. The data also showed that participants' work life was affected by their chronic illness, particularly during flare ups, as they missed work due to symptoms or medical appointments, altered their teaching, and had to work through pain and/or fatigue. This study, despite its small scale, can help people recognise that they may work with chronically ill teachers without realising, raise awareness of the phenomenon, and encourage people to consider their actions and attitudes towards others.

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About the Author

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REFLECTIONS

Cultivating Classroom Community Through Small Talk

Michael Ellis
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Maximizing learner interaction through student talk time (STT) is a central goal for oral communication classes, and to this end teacher training programs commonly offer strategies to reduce their teacher talk time (TTT). Various studies have found that teachers tend to underestimate the amount of TTT during their classes, and it is therefore important to find techniques to monitor and minimize it (Alemayehu; Dellar, 2004; Nápoles & Vázquez-Ramos, 2013; Tsegaye & Davidson, 2014).

Despite this seemingly simple dichotomy of STT as a constructive force and TTT as an obstructive force for promoting language acquisition, there is a growing understanding of the benefits of judicious implementation of teacher talk (TT) to facilitate student output and engagement (Walsh, 2002). Cullen (1998) argues that a more nuanced understanding of TTT is necessary, and that TT about topics outside the classroom can lead to more authentic and effective communication with and among students. Luk (2004) echoes this, proposing that small talk conducted by teachers with students can offer opportunities for less asymmetrical and more animated interaction. Shamsipour and Allami's (2012) findings suggest that TT is an important determining factor in learners' development, and that the strategic use of TT positively influences learning outcomes. The importance of using TT thoughtfully is also supported by Setiawati (2012), who found that TT can provide models for learners, but also that those learners were more engaged when it was limited to a small part of the lesson. These findings support the potential of carefully and constructively implemented TT in the classroom, and also point to its risks when implemented carelessly. Keeping these risks in mind, it is important to develop clear and mindful techniques for using TT successfully.

One possible technique is anecdotal storytelling, which has been shown to help learners develop target language vocabulary and listening skills and increase their motivation (Zaro & Salaberri, 1995). In a review of literature on the effects of storytelling in the foreign language classroom, Lucarevschi (2016) recognizes several patterns which point to storytelling's efficacy as a pedagogical instrument. Specifically, he finds that storytelling offers learners opportunities for targeted practice of specific skills, boosts motivation, and promotes positive social interactions in the classroom. Given this, it is logical to think that storytelling as quick, short, teacher-fronted small talk may be one way to make use of the benefits of TT while avoiding the risks. The purpose of this study is to better understand the use of such anecdotal small talk in the EFL classroom in order to determine whether it is a positive factor for learning outcomes, and if so to suggest what types of stories and methods of delivery are most effective. In the next sections, I briefly introduce through narrative reflection the relevant parts of my educational background as both a student and a novice teacher that sparked my interest in this topic and led me to conduct this study. Then I explain the research methods, findings and conclusions about how we can use teacher fronted storytelling to benefit our learners.

My Experiences with Teacher Fronted Storytelling

As a Student

One of my most memorable high school teachers was Mr. C (pseudonym) who taught 10th grade American Literature. Although the class was meant to cover a range of literary works from history until present day, we did not make it past the 19th century because Mr. C spent the majority of class time telling us his own stories. These stories centered Mr. C himself as a protagonist/hero in a changing and sometimes scary world. The stories were purportedly nonfictional and tended to have politically conservative, often religious themes as Mr. C was a devout Christian. The relevance of these stories to the class content was generally questionable but ultimately unimportant. It did not take much for Mr. C to go off on a long tangent about how he convinced a supermarket cashier not to have an abortion, or about the mathematical proof for the existence of god. Because the stories were repeated so frequently, sometimes we students could strategically predict where and how to prompt him to start one. This made Mr. C one of the most popular teachers at school. Students loved his stories, partly because he was an exceptional storyteller with a powerful voice and natural sense of narrative structure, but also at least partly because they represented a reliable and teacher-sanctioned escape from class. It was much easier to relax and passively consume these stories than to actively participate in discussion of the cultural and philosophical themes in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

I often enjoyed Mr. C's stories myself, but I realized at some point that his style of storytelling was not beneficial to our education. It was around this time that I became interested in teaching English as a foreign language, and I resolved to remember this approach to storytelling as a negative model for what not to do. Several years later when I began my career as a language teacher, I felt quite validated by what I was taught in my teacher training programs.

As a Teacher

I am privileged to have had several opportunities to participate in a diverse range of teacher training courses from my first experience teaching on the JET Program, then shifting to *eikaiwa* (English conversation) teaching and most recently completing an MA in TESOL while teaching at a private Japanese high school. One common theme across all of these courses has been the importance of maximizing STT while minimizing TTT. If our goal is for students to learn to communicate in the target language, we must give them as many chances as possible to do so, both in and out of class. Part of this means learning to shut up, a simple but important lesson which resonated deeply thanks to my experiences as a student summarized above. Over the years I feel I have improved at delivering instructions efficiently, which has enabled me to shut up to greater effect in the promotion of active student engagement.

Although I have developed confidence in this way, the skill has come with unintended consequences. I was made aware of these consequences through a comment I received in an end of year class evaluation in response to the question, "What was your favorite part of class?" I asked this question hoping that most students would focus on the aspects of class that I put the most energy into, such as our robust extensive reading program or the academic writing strand of the curriculum which enables students to write a variety of genres of paragraphs and essays by the time they graduate. However, two of the strongest students independently wrote that their favorite part of class was when I told them what I had eaten for breakfast on a given morning. In this program, vocabulary quizzes were conducted by students in pairs with cards that they made themselves. Because of

this, it took a bit of class time for students to prepare for their cards to deliver the quizzes. Most classes could be ready within a minute, but one class was a bit clumsy at preparing these quizzes and took more time to find and set up their cards. Fearing the silence, I began a routine of talking about what I had eaten for breakfast during this down time to provide some casual but authentic and low-stakes English oral input which would prevent the faster students from disengaging and keep them busy enough until we were ready to start the vocabulary quiz. Sometimes I needed to stretch the explanations for a minute or more, which led to comically detailed explanations of the ingredients of a smoothie or the reason that I could not make it to the store as I had planned to buy eggs the day before. I never imagined that these short, light hearted asides might become some students' favorite part of the whole class.

My first reaction to receiving this feedback was disappointment, because I interpreted it as an indication that students were less interested in the more integral aspects of the curriculum. However, upon reflection I began to consider this feedback more positively and wonder if maybe I had stumbled upon a new tool and strategy to engage students and build rapport. Around the time that I received this feedback, I was in my tenth year of teaching and struggling a bit with the feeling that I was not enjoying as strong teacher-student connections as I had during my early career. Although teacher development no doubt made me a stronger educator, it was not necessarily beneficial to my position in the classroom community. Because minimizing TTT was one of my main goals, my presence in the classroom became weaker. Furthermore, I believe that my growing confidence made me less vulnerable and relatable to the students. I wondered if the breakfast small talk may have been one way to mitigate this and humanize myself by showing short vignettes from my otherwise mysterious life. This positive reception made me reconsider the experience in Mr. C's classroom and the potential value of TTT. Over time, I gradually became more conscious about setting aside short bits of class time to share anecdotes from my life. In this study, I adopted a systematic approach to the sharing of these anecdotes in order to assess their effects on student learning outcomes.

Methods

Teaching Context

This study was conducted in an EFL program at a private senior high school in western Tokyo with a *hensachi* of 73, indicating that the students are academically quite strong. Students at this school tend to have especially high motivation and aptitude for learning English. All students in this study were placed in the lowest proficiency level at this school. The 62 participants were from four different classes I taught, two first year (10th grade) and two third year (12th grade) classes. The first-year classes met for four weekly periods, and the third-year classes for three weekly periods of 50-minute each. These were all compulsory English classes in the main curriculum, with the goal of enabling students to communicate effectively in all four skills. All data was collected voluntarily and anonymously with informed consent. Students were informed that their participation would not affect their grades.

Materials and Procedures

By chance, all four classes happened to meet in succession on Monday mornings of the 2019 school year from periods 1 to 4. As such, I established a routine early in the school year of sharing one anecdote at the very start of each class, even before greeting the students. One anecdote was shared to each of the four classes at the start of each week. Based on my own negative experiences as a student with teacher fronted storytelling explained in the previous section, I took care to make sure that these anecdotes were all short (within one to two

minutes), not repeated more than once, relevant to students' lives, and hopefully funny. I also tried to choose stories that focused on my failures or lessons that I have learned in order to maintain humility and avoid using the classroom as a personal soapbox. For example:

> How many of you like Harry Potter? Have you read the books or seen the movies? [some students raise their hands] Growing up, I was always a fan of Harry Potter and fantasy stories like that, especially because I liked the fantasy *creatures*. In the west there are lots of fantasy creatures like dragons, unicorns, phoenixes, and I loved reading fantasy books because I found them so cool and interesting. So when I came to Japan at first, I enjoyed learning about traditional Japanese fantasies too. I know about things like *kappa*, and *oni*. What are some examples of others? [Typically someone mentions *tengu*, or *yurei*] Right, *tengu*! And actually, I always included *tanuki* [Japanese raccoon dogs] in this fantasy list too, because I often saw them in the same lists. I think *tanuki* are believed to have some magical powers? Anyway, last month I was riding my bike around campus at night, and I heard a sound in the bushes. A *tanuki* jumped out and started running. It didn't cross me, it was actually running right next to me, at the same pace. So for about 100m, maybe 15 seconds, I was just looking and screaming because I thought it was a fantasy creature. "Waaahhh!" [scream while glancing back and forth from the imaginary road and animal, hopefully students laugh here] So I went home and looked them up on Wikipedia… [dramatic pause] *tanuki* are real! If you see one please take a picture and show me. [hopefully students laugh again] OK, good morning everyone. For today's class agenda…

In total, 18 anecdotes were shared between the spring and fall terms. Two bilingual questionnaires at the end of each term and the end-of-year class evaluations were used to assess students' reactions to these anecdotes and their perceived influence on learning outcomes. These questionnaires provided the option of skipping items in the rare cases that students could not recall a particular story, but they used a four-point scale to encourage students to decide clearly between agreement and disagreement. The results are presented and discussed in the following section.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative Analysis

P-values indicated no significant differences between classes or grades. As such, all student responses are compiled and analyzed together in this section. The first item in each survey asked students to assess the routine of anecdotal small talk as a whole, in terms of memorability, enjoyment, and how much it has assisted their learning. These responses are summarized in Table 1 below. In general, students seemed to react favorably in each of these categories. *P*-values indicated that the differences between the spring and fall responses were not statistically significant.

Table 1
Student Holistic Feedback on Small Talk

	Spring	Fall
These stories are memorable.	3.79	3.77
These stories are enjoyable.	3.79	3.81
These stories assist my learning.	3.77	3.78

Note: 4 point scale, 1=disagree, 2=slightly disagree, 3=slightly agree, 4=agree

The second question in each survey asked students to assess their enjoyment of each individual anecdote shared that term. The responses are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Student Feedback on Individual Anecdotes

This story was enjoyable.	4 point scale, 1=disagree, 2=slightly disagree, 3=slightly agree, 4=agree
One more time	3.85
Brother's name	3.76
Morning *sayonara*	3.70
Fantasy *tanuki*	3.70
Zarazara	3.68
Ekiben	3.67
Facebook love	3.66
Unforgettable tongue	3.64
Natto disaster	3.60
Coffee desk	3.55
B-kyu gourmet	3.54
Alarm music	3.54
Chinese fail	3.53
Face leaf	3.46
Atsukiri	3.44
Egg disaster	3.32
Casey pee	3.31
Treadmill emergency	3.29

The third question asked students to rate various ways the small talk has influenced their learning. These responses are summarized in Table 3 below. The differences between the spring and fall responses were again not significant.

Table 3
Student Feedback on the Benefits of Small Talk

Small talk has had a positive effect on my learning with regard to…	Spring	Fall
English listening practice	3.79	3.77
warm-up at the start of class	3.79	3.81
learning more about the teacher	3.77	3.78
creating a fun class environment	3.89	3.87

Note: 4 point scale, 1=disagree, 2=slightly disagree, 3=slightly agree, 4=agree

Separate from the end of term surveys about small talk, a class evaluation was given to students on the last day of class, in December for 3rd year and February for 1st year students. Students were asked to rate various topics from the school year. These responses are summarized in Table 4 below. In both cases, small talk was the most popular part of class.

Table 4
End of Year Class Evaluation Summary

	This was useful.	Overall feedback average*	Rank of small talk with other items
first year students	5.93	5.31	first of 28 items
third year students	5.35	4.84	first of 24 items

*Note: 6 point scale, 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=slightly agree, 5=agree, 6=strongly agree

One final quantitative analysis was conducted on a year-end class review quiz of 15 items, conducted on the online platform of Kahoot on the last day of the first-year class. The purpose of this quiz was not to assess students, but rather to recall various topics introduced in class and see how much they remembered. Students completed the

quiz using mobile phones, and the platform collected data from students' responses, including the time it took them to respond. The question, as follows, was based on the anecdote shared in the Materials and Procedures section above.

> Which "animal" did Mr. Ellis see on his bicycle that surprised him?
> A) a monkey B) a *kappa*
> C) a *tanuki* D) a deer

Data from students' responses are summarized in Table 5 below. Although the story of the *tanuki* was told on May 13, 2019 and not referenced again until this quiz on February 28, 2020, students responded more accurately to this question than any of the 14 other questions. Furthermore, the response time was very quick compared to the other questions, indicating that students were engaged in and retained the content of this story even though it represented a very brief part of the curriculum.

Table 5
Student Responses to the Kahoot Quiz

	small talk question	overall quiz average	Rank
accuracy	91%	57%	first of 15 items
speed	4.8 seconds	8.0 seconds	third of 15 items

Qualitative Analysis

There was a section on each of the end of term surveys for students to respond freely in English or Japanese with their thoughts on the small talk routine. 33 of 62 students in the spring and 20 of 62 students in the fall wrote responses, all of which were positive. The data was thematically coded, and several patterns which appeared in these responses are summarized with illustrative examples in the following sections. These patterns were identified and coded through an inductive approach, not according to predetermined concepts. English responses are unedited with errors included. Japanese responses are translated into English and indicated as so.

Language Learning

The most common comments were about the benefits for language learning. Students mentioned vocabulary, and how the stories helped them to learn new words. One student said the stories helped them to learn the genre of storytelling, which isn't explicitly taught in this school's curriculum. "I can learn the way of giving short talk humorously!!" This response suggests that these anecdotes might have served as a model for how students can tell their own stories in English.

Classroom Environment

Another common pattern was comments about how the small talk contributed to a positive classroom environment. For example, students said that starting the class with these stories "made me relax," or how "class became more fun and I smiled" [my translation]. One student commented "small talk is introduction of ELA3," indicating that they felt it was an important and clearly established routine.

Content

A few students commented about the content of the small talk. This was surprising to the researcher, as compelling lessons were not one of the considerations in choosing the stories to share. Relevance and humor were prioritized over depth. Even so, one student wrote that these anecdotes "teach us important lessons," pointing to the potential value of small talk in conveying meaningful content, despite its short length.

One Heartfelt Response

One student wrote their response on the fall survey in some detail, and touched upon all of the patterns summarized above.

> The stories were so memorable I would suddenly remember them a month later and start laughing. My English ability is weak and I couldn't catch everything, so I felt disappointed when I couldn't understand why everyone was laughing. That's how much I looked forward to these stories. [my translation]

This response points to both the potential effectiveness of small talk when used in class this way and the risks if students are unable to follow the story. Though this student ultimately had a positive attitude towards small talk in the classroom, their response indicates the need to keep the language level appropriate and to choose the content carefully.

Coda

Before proposing conclusions which might be made from this study, I will quickly revisit my experiences with teacher-fronted storytelling and explain how this study has contributed to that journey. When I first decided to analyze student reactions to these anecdotes, I was beginning to positively reevaluate a negative experience I had as a student and a teaching practice discouraged in my teacher training. In this way, this study represents a kind of climax to a transformative experience of losing my blanket aversion to TTT. Since then, I have continued to share these anecdotes with the same considerations placed on those in the study, and have more consciously reconsidered other aspects of my teaching practice which might benefit from a more nuanced understanding.

Limitations and Further Research

The main limitation of this study is that most of the data were self-reported by the students themselves. It is possible and perhaps even likely that they are overestimating the utility of small talk simply because they enjoyed it as a form of unassessed, low-stakes authentic communication with their teacher. While the importance of this type of communication in the classroom should not be underemphasized, it will be necessary to develop instruments to more precisely measure the benefits of small talk.

Further research might thus seek to quantifiably measure the positive benefits of small talk for students' language learning, especially with respect to listening fluency gains and vocabulary acquisition. It would also be fruitful to determine how much of the students' positive reaction was a result of it being a short aside from the main curriculum, and whether anecdotes such as those in this study would be useful as the central focus of a class or unit. If this speaking genre could be targeted in a unit, the logical next step would be to present and scaffold the task of storytelling to enable students to share their own anecdotal small talk.

Conclusions

This study supports the argument that judicious use of TTT has a place in the communicative foreign language classroom and offers one such technique for employing it. While the extent of the various benefits suggested by the survey may be questioned, the results demonstrate unambiguously that this particular implementation of anecdotal small talk was well received by the students, and that this approach merits further study in the future. The results of this study provide evidence that this reevaluation was worthwhile, and confirmed to me that I had found a powerful new tool in an unexpected place. The results also echo findings from other studies and provide further evidence of storytelling's benefits for skills-based language practice, motivation, and social interactions in the classroom. Although the study was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic in exclusively face-to-face classes, the technique may also be adapted to cultivate classroom community in online teaching, which are generally felt to be isolating and lonely. In these ways, the study

has implications for teacher training programs, which might better serve novice teachers by fostering understandings of the complexity of TTT. Likewise, veteran teachers who have been conditioned to avoid TTT might benefit from unlearning some of those rules. As language teachers, it is OK to take the figurative microphone and talk about ourselves. Sometimes.

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Reflection on Improving L2 Learners' Speaking Performance in Distance Learning

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This reflection presents my teaching practice at university to improve L2 learners' speaking performance through distance learning. In order to facilitate learners' interaction in the speaking tasks provided via synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC), I offered asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) pre-tasks in advance since ACMC provides learners with preparative and reflective time for the intended learning. However, ACMC might cause L2 learners to experience a sense of isolation, misunderstandings, a lack of collaboration, and a lack of social and emotional reality. To deal with these potential challenges, the instruction on ACMC interaction was provided based on the notion of social presence within the Community of Inquiry (Garrison, 2017). This reflection offered two personal insights: (1) attending to social presence of ACMC tasks could facilitate L2 learners' text-based interaction; and (2) facilitated interactions in ACMC pre-tasks could lead to students' improved speaking performance in the subsequent SCMC tasks.

The spread of COVID-19 has kept some undergraduate students who have pre-existing medical conditions or who live with elderly people with a high risk of severe disease away from face-to-face educational environments and has led to an increase in distance learning. To promote educational equity, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has encouraged universities to ensure that distance learning has interactivity and quality equivalent to face-to-face learning (MEXT, 2022). Under such conditions, I was in charge of an "English Conversation" distance learning class for 10 third-year business majors for 15 weeks in 2021. The students were approximately at the beginner level of English-speaking proficiency (i.e., from the A1 to A2 level of CEFR). The learning outcome of this class was to improve four skills in business English, mainly focusing on listening and speaking.

To improve the level of the students' learning outcomes, I designed the weekly lessons, adding asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) pre-tasks (i.e., text chat and discussion forums) to the subsequent synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) tasks (i.e., 90-minute video conferencing), using Microsoft Teams. The theoretical background to this design was twofold: reducing cognitive load through pre-task planning, and facilitating cross-modality transfer of language skill. Firstly, a substantial body of L2 studies suggests that providing L2 speakers with pre-task planning reduces the cognitive load they face, and thus improves the accuracy and fluency of oral production (Burns, 2012; Ortega, 1999). In terms of computer-mediated communication, adding text-based ACMC pre-task planning in advance of SCMC tasks reduces the cognitive burden on L2 learners' oral performance, and thus contributes to a higher level of production than when assigning only SCMC tasks; and this is particularly true for beginner learners (Payne, 2004). The SCMC mode usually has time limitations for planning and preparation for what learners have to say, which increases their cognitive load and results in increased

errors in speaking in terms of grammar and pronunciation. On the other hand, ACMC mode provides learners with ample time for reflection and language manipulation to express opinions, respond to peers and negotiate meaning, which is much more cognitively friendly to L2 learners than SCMC. Therefore, I selected ACMC pre-task planning prior to SCMC speaking tasks. Secondly, sequencing from ACMC to SCMC speaking tasks induces the cross-modality transfer of language skills from writing to speaking (Abrams, 2003; Blake, 2009; Payne & Whitney, 2002; Satar & Özdener, 2008). That is, engaging L2 learners in regular text chat stimulates learners to subvocalize the written texts they produced in their mind, which later, positively impacts on their oral performance (Blake, 2009).

However, it was also important to consider how the use of ACMC might cause L2 learners, including my students, to face the following typical types of difficulties: (1) a sense of isolation, (2) misunderstandings, (3) a lack of collaboration, and (4) a lack of social and emotional reality (Delahunty, et al., 2014). In addition, since most of my students did not have any experiences of ACMC in English, it appeared vital that I be proactive and supportive regarding dealing with the possible challenges when integrating ACMC into my class. To mitigate the above difficulties, I provided at the beginning explicit models of how students should interact with peers for successful ACMC. A theory that deals with such social aspects is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, 2017). The CoI framework is a generic and coherent system that indicates deep and meaningful learning experiences in which learners are collaboratively engaged in critical inquiry and thereby improve their personal reflection and shared understanding. Such learning is realized by developing three interdependent elements, i.e., social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Social presence is defined as the ability of learners "to identify with a group, communicate openly in a trusting environment, and develop personal and affective relationships progressively by way of projecting their individual personalities" (Garrison, 2017, p. 25). Since the notion of social presence does not only attend to social and emotional aspects in ACMC environments but also strongly focuses on achieving learning outcomes, I reasoned that this could be helpful for my students to successfully carry out the tasks and avoid the potential challenges.

Objectives

Teachers can use this reflection:

- to avoid the difficulties L2 learners may experience in ACMC in terms of emotion and socialization, and
- to facilitate L2 learners' ACMC for successful speaking performance in SCMC.

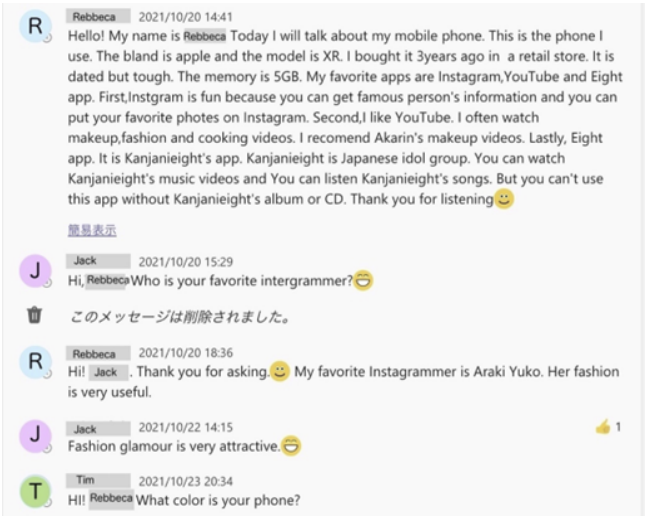
Practical implications

By reflecting on my students' interaction in ACMC tasks, I gained some insights into how to deal with salient social and emotional aspects as follows:

1. Showing a model of how to express learners' emotions may improve a sense of belonging, and improve interpersonal relationships. ACMC is typically face-less and body-less, which thus encourages learners to use virtual facial expressions, body language, and interjections that may have functions analogous to the affective expressions used in SCMC and lead to the formation of closer bonds between learners. My students frequently used the following affective expressions (see Figure 1):
    a. emoticons (e.g., thumbs up, smile, laugh)
    b. interjections (e.g., *haha, oh, wow*)

c. exclamation marks (!)

Figure 1
Screenshot of Students' Asynchronous Online Communication



2. Showing a model of open communication may make learners feel more comfortable in ACMC. Many students asked questions of each other and expressed appreciation for peers' posts, and interestingly, some of the students voluntarily extended their threads, going beyond the minimum requirements for the number of posts. My students' open communication was realized as follows:
    a. continuing a thread without creating a new thread
    b. asking questions and responding to questions (e.g., *Why do you want ...?*)
    c. expressing appreciation (e.g., *Thank you for asking*) and complimenting (e.g., *That sounds great*)

3. Showing a model of how to become cohesive as a group might help students to develop a sense of collaboration. The students frequently used vocatives and phatic expressions to encourage peers to reply as follows:
    a. vocatives (e.g., *Jack, Rebecca*[1]) (1: For this article, they were assigned a pseudonym for anonymity)
    b. salutations, phatic expressions (e.g., *hi, hello*)

    Although my students interacted with such expressions, it did not seem that they collaboratively formed a cohesive group of 10 students, because the task focuses were mainly on individual interaction (e.g., *What are the best things about your personality?*) rather than group discussions (e.g., *What are the advantages and disadvantages of business meetings and training increasingly taking place online?*).

4. Overall, the students' ACMC appeared to be facilitated by explicitly showing a model interaction based on the notion of social presence within the CoI framework. My students seemed to enjoy chatting with each other, minimizing the risk of difficulties that might occur in ACMC in terms of emotion and socialization.

5. Most importantly, successful ACMC pre-tasks were able to help L2 learners improve their speaking performance (see Payne, 2020). In the course, each lesson had a minimum goal that the university set (e.g., to negotiate a new deal, to describe an electronic device, to solve a business problem). However, given my students' beginner-level English proficiency, it would have been difficult to achieve these goals if they only had opportunities to speak impromptu in SCMC. Thus, engaging in ACMC pre-task planning helped them sufficiently plan and prepare for the subsequent SCMC tasks; and in fact, many of the students appeared to accurately express their ideas with only occasional stumbling and

communication breakdowns during SCMC tasks.

6. Moreover, establishing time parameters (e.g., posting a comment at least three days before the SCMC tasks) ensured that learners were well-prepared for the SCMC tasks. For the first few weeks, one or two students posted their comments right before the pre-scheduled weekly SCMC lessons. This made it impossible for peers to respond to them, and thus they lost meaningful opportunities to communicate with peers.

7. Finally, providing a small incentive (5% of the overall course grade) for participating in ACMC seemed useful for increasing learners' engagement and motivation for interacting with peers.

Reflective Conclusion

My reflection concludes with two personal insights: (1) attending to social presence of ACMC tasks seemed to improve facilitation of interaction between beginner-level L2 learners by helping them mitigate the difficulties they might otherwise experience from the emotional and social perspectives, and (2) facilitated interactions in ACMC pre-tasks seemed to lead to their improved speaking performance in the subsequent SCMC tasks, providing preparative and reflective time for the intended learning and reducing the cognitive load of spontaneous conversation. For me, the next phase of this journey will be to view ACMC pre-tasks from the perspectives of teaching presence and cognitive presence in order to improve the quality of ACMC interaction. The perspective of cognitive presence could help to measure the extent to which students achieve higher-order learning outcomes (e.g., recognizing and posing questions, expressing divergent opinions, collaboratively producing solutions or explanations, or critically assessing co-constructed knowledge). The teaching presence perspective might also help to measure how successful our teaching practice actually is in the virtual environment (e.g., establishing netiquette, setting the learning atmosphere, or responding to technical concerns). Many of us know that it is challenging for us to promote meaningful distance learning of a second/foreign language; however, I hope this reflection will contribute to advances in this field of our endeavors.

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EXPLORATIONS

Creating an Online Resource Hub for English Language Teachers

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Due to the recent rapid adoption of digital technology, online collaboration has become easier than ever. Physical distance, time differences, and even global pandemics are no longer impediments to sharing educational resources and information. Roughly one year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we noticed a need in our academic department at a private Japanese university for a more modern, efficient, and collaborative way for teachers and administrators to share resources and ideas. To fill this need we came together to create an online resource hub. While the creation of the hub was not driven by the pandemic, as we had already begun working on its foundation close to a year beforehand, the timing was somewhat serendipitous, since we were piloting the hub just as the whole world was forced online. The following report will explore how the resource hub was developed and promoted, its practical applications, and finally the impact it has had during the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic.

The Situation Prior to the Hub

The main problem that we were setting out to solve was a lack of a concrete means for teachers to collaborate and share materials. Prior to the creation of the resource hub, each teacher in our department was largely left to their own devices. While there were regularly scheduled faculty meetings, these focused primarily on general administrative matters, allocating little or no time for teachers to compare notes or ask for help with classroom teaching. Outside of this, the only way that teachers could collaborate was through chance encounters with each other between class periods or during office hours. Additionally, some teachers felt overwhelmed due to a lack of linguistic support needed to function in a Japanese institution and were thus unable to fully focus on their classroom teaching. With such issues facing our department, initial steps for the hub's creation were taken.

Hub Development and Promotion

When developing the online resource hub, simplicity and organization were key principles implemented to ensure the service would be a high-quality accessible tool instructors could benefit from. Throughout the planning phase, ease of use was at the forefront of design, as the level of technological savviness varied between department staff. This also factored into our decision of which platform would be the best fit. As the hub was created without funding from the university, only free platforms could be used. Of the large number of file-sharing websites available, Dropbox was ultimately chosen, given its large number of features, level of support, and user-friendly interface that most instructors within the department were already familiar with. Once the platform was decided, discussion of how best the website could be accessed by multiple users began. The most practical idea was to have all users share a single account by providing

an email and password created specifically for this project.

After the account was created, organization of materials became the focus, as clear and precise labeling can save teachers time when looking for materials suited to their needs (Cheng & Hwang, 2012). Information was classified into two categories: (1) Administrative Forms and Guides, and (2) Course Resources. All pertinent administrative documents acquired from the university were added, including forms to reschedule classes, how to access salary/payment information, and guides to tax filing. Many of these forms were only available in Japanese and were thus challenging to understand for instructors less proficient in the language. Therefore, the hub developers fluent in Japanese provided detailed translations of a handful of documents with the promise of increasing the number of translations over time. A series of video tutorials were also created for navigating the university website and uploaded to YouTube, with a link to each provided in the corresponding space on Dropbox. All forms were categorized and placed into separate folders, each with a small description of the documents contained within. These descriptions provided tags and keywords allowing teachers to find the file they needed with ease.

Course resources followed a similar design by having all materials categorized by textbook, as each course taught required the use of a specific book. Materials for the various texts included original worksheets, activity descriptions, and original testing handouts. For materials that could be applied to multiple texts or courses, a general folder was made and listed on the main textbook page. Additionally, materials created to support students with disabilities, as well as files related to an e-learning program used in multiple course curriculums, were given their own folders. As the number of folders increased, tags and descriptions were a top priority so that staff could quickly and easily find what they wanted. Members of the hub community were free to contribute materials on the condition they provide their names and any necessary explanation for their contribution. However, materials that were subject to copyright, such as textbook scans and official audio or video files could not be submitted as was explicitly mentioned in a terms of use section on the main hub page. Official publisher websites or the original source of an item could be linked to in the appropriate Hub section. Furthermore, while any material created by an instructor is regarded as their intellectual property (Holmes & Levin, 2000), it was made clear that any submission would enter the public domain and could then be downloaded and edited by any member of the department for use in their own courses.

Lastly, once initial setup was completed for the hub, several steps were taken to raise awareness and promote it to the rest of the department. A brief presentation in the spring of 2021 during a yearly university colloquium was given. Due to the onset of Covid-19, the presentation was held over the video conferencing software Zoom and was unfortunately not seen by a large portion of the target department audience. Following this presentation and the reintroduction of face-to-face classes on campus a year later, advertisements were made and posted in a shared office that gave teachers the login details and information showcasing what could be found by using the hub. Through communication with the department coordinators, the hub was unofficially accepted and given its own segment during an orientation meeting in early 2022 reaching all department members. Accompanying this presentation was a PDF with more detailed information that was distributed to each teacher.

Practical Usage and Knowledge Sharing

The online resource hub primarily serves as a tool teachers can use, regardless of their location, to find administrative documents, guides, and course materials. Once the hub was created and promoted to the rest of the department, teachers were free to use it however they saw fit. Using shared account information, anyone could log in and browse the ever-growing catalog of materials. Aside from the administrative documents which were provided by the university, the rest of the hub has been completely reliant on the community of English teachers in the department. Everyone has been encouraged to add what they could to the hub with the belief that what they uploaded could help their peers searching for new ideas or ways to teach specific course content. Additional instruction could be given in the comments section of any submission which could also allow for better collaboration and feedback between instructors. This cycle of uploading original materials and using what others add ensures that content is always fresh and being continuously developed, scrutinized, and improved.

The importance and versatility of the resource hub goes far beyond providing teachers with the means to share files. A secondary advantage to using the hub lies in the realm of knowledge sharing, which can lead to teacher development and can ultimately benefit student performance (Ronfeldt, 2015). Knowledge sharing can be defined as the process of donating intellectual capital to others in addition to absorbing knowledge given by another to increase an individual's intellectual capabilities (Kausar et al., 2020). Those who use the resource hub will thus be participating in knowledge sharing. With access to materials from co-workers, individuals gain new information they can incorporate into their own lessons through, for example, adaptation of the material, or using new ideas to reevaluate their teaching approach.

The willingness to share can stem from a variety of reasons, most commonly an individual's self-efficacy, familiarity with the person(s) they are sharing with or seeing their contribution impact others in a positive way (Tseng & Kuo, 2013). Without providing monetary reward or other more tangible incentives, the hub relies on both a teacher's altruism and their desire to plan lessons more easily and efficiently. The developers of the resource hub act both as the administrators and promoters encouraging this type of communal atmosphere. Such leadership and commitment are essential to create a culture within the workplace to facilitate positive developmental growth amongst educators (Runhaar & Sanders, 2015). The hub as it stands is a project created by teachers for teachers; however, to obtain maximum benefit and see more people partake in knowledge sharing, it would be necessary for the university to start similar programs and provide incentives for the use of a hub-like system.

Significance in a COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19 Environment

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in December of 2019, educators around the world were forced to reevaluate how they conducted classes. In many countries, education facilities were forced to suddenly shift from a physical classroom to an online one using cloud-based video conferencing services such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. This compelled educators to quickly adopt online tools with which they might be unfamiliar or not have adequate access to, depending on how prepared they were for online lessons before the pandemic started (Zhang et al., 2020). In Japan, while most public primary and secondary schools were kept face-to-face, universities, primarily due to the significantly larger number of students on campus and commuting from various prefectures in the region, opted for

online classes. Teachers found themselves conducting lessons from their homes, or from empty classrooms on campus if they lacked the equipment necessary for video conferencing. Due to this transition to an online space, educators were secluded from their peers without means to converse as in an office space.

In the time before COVID-19, teachers who shared materials or ideas largely did so interpersonally in their facility (Acker, et al., 2014). This was no longer possible due to new regulations on how classes would be conducted in Japanese universities during the pandemic. Therefore, the development of the online resource hub became vital to maintaining a system where educators could freely communicate and share both administrative documents and course resources. As this approach to sharing information was underutilized by teachers at the university, giving demonstrations during orientation meetings was crucial. It was necessary to show that both lessons and materials could be digitized and that knowledge of this technology and how to properly use it may be required in future everyday life should COVID-19 or any other virus persist (Miller, 2022). Even after several years and numerous vaccinations, universities that have students and staff who are at higher risk due to pre-existing medical concerns remain online. Interaction continues to be difficult, which suggests that the resource hub will remain necessary, as it connects individuals together while the pandemic keeps them from being physically in the same classroom or office. Continuing to educate teachers about technologies such as the hub and to encourage its use can lead to more collaboration amongst teachers (Wen & Tan, 2020). As it is currently not known when or if life as normal can return to the university, the resource hub will continue to support teacher needs through the sharing of materials. Being knowledgeable about using such a tool can also be beneficial to teachers in the future, in case such an unprecedented situation repeats itself.

Conclusion and Future Use

In conclusion, the creation of the resource hub has helped to facilitate better collaboration and sharing between colleagues. It has allowed them to share materials for class such as worksheets and rubrics, as well as to provide linguistic support for various administrative tasks to be conducted in Japanese. While the current coronavirus pandemic has been a terrible burden, the creation of the hub was somewhat serendipitously timed, as it turned out to be a great resource when teaching moved online.

The future of this particular resource hub is still unclear. However, as the need for collaboration and knowledge sharing is unlikely to go away, the hub will likely continue to be used and improved upon. Similar resource hubs could prove to be useful at other institutions, and the development of regional, national, or international hub-like systems would also be beneficial to teachers everywhere, particularly those in remote locations.

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Understanding Language Teacher Identities in L2 Teaching

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As a Chinese native speaker who is pursuing a PhD degree in Japanese linguistics in the United States, as well as a PhD student who is teaching Japanese in the classroom, how to deal with my various professional identities (e.g., a female student, a PhD candidate, a Japanese learner/user, a Japanese teacher, etc.) is an unavoidable topic in my daily life. I have gradually realized that how I perceive myself as a professional profoundly influences my pedagogical choices. Furthermore, Varghese, et. al. (2005) also underscores the significance of language teacher identities (LTIs) by identifying this topic as "an emerging subject of interest in research on language teacher education and teacher development" (p. 21). Thus, as a Japanese language learner/teacher in an English-speaking country, and as an assistant editor of this journal, I firmly believe that research on LTIs is essential for teachers' professional development.

The Increasingly Recognized Significance of Language Teacher Identities

In the last two decades, the number of studies of LTIs has actually increased substantially because of the rapid expansion of research on identities in general (Barkhuizen, 2016; Kayi-Aydar, 2019). The existing literature has revealed several aspects of teaching activities that intersect with "identity work" (De Costa & Norton, 2017, p. 7), namely, self-perception (Kanno & Stuart, 2011), teachers' teaching beliefs (Oda, 2017), and understanding "identity as pedagogy" (Morgan, 2004). Varghese et al. (2005) suggests that "language teacher identity is an emerging subject of interest in research on language teacher education and teacher development" (p. 21). They highlight the link between LTIs and their professional development in terms of language teacher education, and they note that promoting teachers' professional development will ultimately benefit language teaching. For teachers, learning to teach involves not only acquiring new knowledge and skills but also forming and adopting a "teacher identity" as an ongoing process of "becoming" (Clarke, 2008). The process of input (learning new teaching strategies), transition (consuming this knowledge), and output (practicing teaching with this new knowledge), is indeed a development of one's professional identity. Varghese et al. (2016) also suggests that researching LTIs helps teacher candidates understand themselves, increases their ability to exercise agency as language teachers, and connects their teaching knowledge and teaching practice.

Previous research largely examined the relationship between teachers' development and their emotions and cognitions (Barcelos, 2017; Golombek, 2017; Hargreaves, 1998; Kubanyiova, 2017; Nias, 1996; Yazan, 2018). In these works, the authors emphasize that language teachers' emotions, cognitions, feelings and beliefs have a fundamental impact on their actions within classroom activities (Golombek, 2017) and their support for students' engagement (Kubanyiova, 2017). According to Barcelos (2017), "the more central a belief and more connected to their emotions, the more influential it is to their identities" (p. 147). Since the action of teaching is essentially constituted "of human interaction by nature" (Yazan, 2018, p. 38), teachers' emotions, as the "most dynamic qualities" (Hargreaves, 1998), inevitably impact their teaching (Nias, 1996). Therefore, understanding LTIs in terms of their associated emotional states is valuable for teacher-student interactions

within dynamic teaching contexts, and it promotes teachers' professional development and eventually benefits their language teaching.

According to Barkhuizen (2017), language teachers "work towards understanding who they are and who they desire or fear to be" (p. 4) and choose to "enact different aspects of who they are as teachers in different discursive encounters" (p. 7). In other words, language teachers repetitively negotiate with two issues through their teaching: "Who am I at this moment?" and "Who do I want to become?" (Yazan, 2018, p. 25). Matsuda (2017) also reflected on how his professional identity "plays an important role" (p. 241) in his teaching through both how he teaches and how he presents himself. Therefore, language teachers' viewpoints, their feelings, and how they position or identify themselves as professionals (Yazan, 2018) are complexly intertwined with their beliefs, conceptions, philosophies, and "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, p. 296). In this sense, it is reasonable to argue that LTIs determine and are determined by language teachers' experiences of teacher learning and teaching practice. Since teachers' self-cognition and beliefs about the future constantly impact their actions in the present, LTIs ultimately and significantly impact their second/foreign language teaching practices.

Based on the understanding of LTIs, this literature review paper offers possible directions for exploring Japanese language teacher identities, as well as their implications for Japanese language teacher education in the future. However, since English is still a global dominant language, previous literature has heavily relied on investigating the LTIs of English language teachers, while the identities of Japanese foreign language teachers are lamentedly understudied. Although Japanese has been widely regarded as a less commonly taught language (see https://ncolctl.org) in the United States, it actually ranked sixth (following Spanish, French, American Sign Language, German, Italian) in terms of languages other than English studied since 2009 (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010; Goldberg, Looney, & Lusin, 2015). Furthermore, Japanese even replaced Italian as the fifth "in the ranking of the fifteen most commonly taught languages" (Looney & Lusin, 2019, p. 4) studied by American students in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education. More importantly, this report specifically points out that although enrollment in foreign language courses other than English dropped by 9.2% overall nationwide, "only Japanese and Korean showed gains in enrollments," and "Japanese enrollments increased by 3.1%, from 66,771 in 2013 to 68,810 in 2016" (Looney & Lusin, 2019, p. 4). That is to say, despite a national drop in enrollment in foreign language courses overall, the number of students choosing to study Japanese still increased steadily. The survey report on Japanese-language education abroad from the Japan Foundation (2018) also confirms this growth in terms of university-level Japanese learners (Japan Foundation, 2018; Looney & Lusin, 2019). Given this increased enrollment of university-level Japanese language learners, the need for Japanese language teachers at the university level will increase predictably and consequentially. Therefore, for Japanese language teachers, especially for pre-service teachers or novice teachers, it would be meaningful for their professional development, and ultimately their practice of teaching Japanese as a second/foreign language, if they are provided with the chance to explore "who I am" and "whom I want to be".

Therefore, this exploration of the literature on LTIs sheds light on how this theoretical and scholarly work relates to practical L2 teaching concerns, especially regarding the significance of researching LTIs for teachers of Japanese. In this article, I put this literature into conversation with my own

teaching experience and identity work to suggest potential resonances for other language educators.

Identity Within the Poststructural Viewpoint

Language teacher identity is, to begin with, a sort of identity. Traditionally, identity was viewed as fixed, unitary, and categorized by sources of power from nature, institutions, individuals, or groups (Gee, 2000). Poststructuralists, however, challenge the notion of fixed and stable identity and regard identity as fluid, dynamic, and continuously shifting (Antaki, 1998; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006). In poststructural viewpoints, identity is "capable of both reproducing and destabilising the discursive order" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 34), and identity work is able to be "analysed in talk" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 34) within "multiple and changing contexts" (Steadman, 2020, p. 31). Additionally, identity ascription is "occasioned by the specifics of the interactions" and "is part of the dynamically emerging trajectory of the conversation" (Antaki, 1998, p. 85). Zimmerman (1998) also underscores the connection between identity and discourse by specifically treating identity as "an element of context for talk-in-interaction" (p. 87). According to Zimmerman (1998), identity is an element that (1) constitutes an interlocutor's utilization of linguistic or discourse devices, (2) indicates and theorizes about self and others, and (3) displays a categorization of membership (e.g., Sacks, 1972). In other words, identity should be regarded as a part of context, and it can be practiced and observed through conversational interactions. Based on this view, Zimmerman (1998) suggests that with regard to both proximal context at the interactional level and the distal context for social activities beyond interactions, identities could be examined at three levels: discourse identities integrated "in the moment-by-moment organization of the interaction" (p. 90), situated identities that are employed "within the precincts of particular types of situation" (p. 90), and transportable identities that "travel with individuals across situations and are potentially relevant in and for any situation and in and for any spate of interaction" (p. 90). Take my case as an example. If I ask a question to my students in a Japanese language class, how I phrase this question could be affected by my discourse identity as an asker, my situated identity as a Japanese language teacher, and my transportable identity as a female and a foreigner. From this example, one can see that a teacher's pedagogical choice is not isolated or comes from nowhere. A teacher's classroom practice is highly contextual and strongly influenced by their cognition of "who I am" at the particular moment in the specific occasion.

Language Teacher Identities

With the growth of research on identity, poststructuralists have also reinforced conceptions of identity in the field of the second/foreign language acquisition and teaching (Block, 2007; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Morgan, 2004; Norton, 2013).

After the concept of identity was introduced into the field of second/foreign language acquisition and teaching, it took two directions. One direction focuses on learners' identities in terms of language learning (e.g., Firth and Wagner, 1997; Norton, 2013). Firth and Wagner (1997) problematized some fundamental notions such as "learner, nonnative, native speaker, and interlanguage" (p. 286). They suggest that the notion of nonnative/native speaker lacks regard for emic dimension, and nonnative/native speaker is "only one identity from a multitude of social identities" (p. 292), since language learners also hold other identities (e.g., male, father, husband, friend, colleague, teacher, etc.) and many of these identities "can be relevant simultaneously, and all of which are motile"

(Firth and Wagner, 1997, p. 292). Their study is "symptomatic of a general trend to open up SLA to social theory and sociological and sociolinguistic research" (Block, 2007, p. 863) and explore connections between identity and second language learning. The other direction of identity theorizing within the study of language teaching and learning pays closer attention to language teachers (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997; Varghese et. al., 2005; Kanno & Stuart, 2011), examining how LTIs impact their pedagogical choices inside the classroom (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997), their interactions with colleagues outside the classroom (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015), and their professional development in the future (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Liu & Xu, 2011).

As the foregoing demonstrated, from the poststructural perspective, identity is viewed as fluid and dynamic (e.g., Antaki, 1998; Bamberg, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Zimmermann (1998) also highlights the relationship between identity and context by regarding identity as "an element of context for talk-in-interaction" (p. 87). In other words, identity should be regarded as a part of the context, and it can be practiced and observed in conversational interactions. Similar to identity research in general, LTIs are also not context-free but crucially contextualized (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Barkhuizen, 2016; Duff & Uchida, 1997). However, standing out from identity research in general, the specialty of LTI research, as pointed out by Duff and Uchida (1997), lies in contextual elements that are constantly negotiated with language teachers, such as "classroom/institutional culture, instructional materials, and reactions from students and colleagues" (p. 460).

Barkhuizen (2017) theorizes LTIs as "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" (p. 4). Based on Barkhuizen (2017)'s theory, LTIs are (1) performed rather than possessed by language teachers (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Watson, 2007; Zhang & Jensen, 2013), (2) could be but are not always limited to the "here-and-now" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 6), and (3) are capable of being narrated through language teachers making sense of their own experiences (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Leigh, 2019; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013).

LTIs in Relation to Performance, Emotion, Belief and Narration

First, teachers perform being teachers rather than possess their identities as objects. It is normal for language teachers like me to make detailed lesson plans before teaching. We actively design our behaviors, gestures, and even what to say during the class. We "perform" being teachers based on our "beliefs and theories of and about teaching [and] are guided by [our] previous experience and identities as a learner and as a teacher" (Mok, 1994, p. 109). However, situations in the classroom do not always follow our imagination, thus our performative displays are always "dialogic and negotiated, suggesting possibilities rather than certainties" (Morgan, 2017, p. 206), since language teachers actively choose to "enact different aspects of who they are as teachers in different discursive encounters" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 7). Mok (1994) studied the written reflections (journals and practicum reports) of 12 ESL teachers, including experienced and inexperienced ones. Thus, to summarize, how teachers perform being teachers at a given moment is affected and determined by their assumptions and beliefs about what teachers should be. In addition, their viewpoints, assumptions, and beliefs constantly shape and are being shaped by their choices to perform.

Second, LTIs are strongly influenced by teachers' emotion and belief. They are constantly "negotiated and [language teachers] construct different changeable identities in the process of interacting with others and with things in different contextual spaces" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 8). Namely, LTIs are affected by teachers' feelings about "what is going on" between their inner

thoughts and their surrounding materials and environments. When I teach in a real class, I always encounter something that I didn't predict, such as emergencies, students violating academic integrities, or just simple unexpected questions from students. These unpredicted situations could also affect my teaching emotionally at the exact moment. Therefore, LTIs are affected by teachers' feelings, which are related to both inside teachers themselves and outside in the surrounding world (Barkhuizen, 2017). Additionally, teachers generally have their own ideas "of what excellence in teaching means and what their imagined self as a mature, fully-developed teacher would look like" (Richards, 2017, p. 142), with these future-oriented "possible selves" also affecting LTIs and playing central roles in guiding language teachers' actions (Kubanyiova, 2017). Exemplified, it's similar to a question that I ask myself frequently – "What kind of language teacher do I want to become?" Of course, this kind of teacher could be an imagined one that possesses important characteristics of a "good teacher". However, for me, the "possible self" is a real person that I want to learn from: the chair of my PhD dissertation committee. I would like to be a teacher like her: knowledgeable, passionate about teaching and doing research, and always patient with students. This belief of a "possible self" also acts as a guide for my choices and practices in the present context. Thus, LTIs are a form of imagining, and it is important to explore "the language teacher's hopes and desires for the future, and their imagined identities" (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2017).

Third, LTIs are storying because "being a language teacher is an ongoing, narrated process" which integrates one's "experiences in the past and present, as well as those anticipated in the future" (Block, 2017, p. 34). Through narration, language teachers are able to make sense of, and then reshape, their experiences. Aiming to underscore the significance of narrative research for understanding LTIs, Hayes (2017) presented his narrative data collected in Sri Lanka and Thailand, concluding that LTIs should not be "solely bound up with expertise in the language and proficiency in teaching methods" (p. 56), since teachers have their own concerns and preoccupations. Hence "teachers exercise their own agency" and "have their own strongly held views of themselves as teachers" (Hayes, 2017, p. 57). As a Japanese language teacher, I usually choose to show my professional side in my Japanese classes. However, since almost none of my students are from Japan, I sometimes intentionally choose to tell stories about me, as a foreigner, encountering some difficulties or experiencing some embarrassments when I was living in Japan. I want my students to know that I understand them and their feelings by telling those stories. Through these narrations, I also make sense of an aspect of my LTIs as a non-native Japanese language teacher.

LTIs Are Historical, Contemporary, and Future-Oriented

Moreover, LTIs are historical, contemporary, and future-oriented (Block, 2017; Norton, 2017; Oda, 2017). As noted previously, Block (2017) regards LTIs as bringing "together experiences in the past and present, as well as those anticipated in the future" (p. 34). Oda (2017) also suggests that LTIs are teachers' perceptions of what resources they have "accumulated through past experiences inside and outside the classroom in order to respond by taking action in teaching at the present time and in the future" (p. 225). In other words, LTIs are determined by what language teachers have experienced previously, are influenced by teachers' feelings about "what is going on" currently, and are guided by teachers' beliefs about "who I want to be" in the future. In addition, LTIs are related to both teachers' inner thoughts and feelings, as well as the surrounding world. Moreover, the

negotiation between individual and social/cultural dimensions constantly happens (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Tsui, 2007; Xu, 2017). Therefore, given the continuous negotiation process, LTIs are widely viewed as dynamic, relational, multiple, and constructed (Barkhuizen 2016; Ennser-Kananen & Wang, 2016; Hadfield, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Mercer, 2017).

My Understanding of Language Teacher Identities

Although Varghese, et. al (2005) proposed that LTIs could be analyzed through two notions of "identity-in-discourse" and "identity-in-practice" (p. 39), it is still unclear how the line should be drawn. As demonstrated, identities are fluid and dynamic, and it is completely reasonable to regard languages or narratives in particular contexts as consequences of language teachers' practices. As Kanno and Stuart (2011) point out, discursively constructed identities could be viewed as part of the identities-in-practice, as "discursively constructed identities are verbal expressions of the ongoing mutual relationship between the self and the practice of a teacher" (p. 240). As Bamberg (2006) suggests that language use could also be regarded as an action, especially in the "contexts in which narratives take place" (p. 139), language teachers' utilization of language and narratives could also be regarded as practices instead of considering their narrations or stories strictly and merely within the notion of discourse. In this sense, teachers' narratives and interactions with their peers and colleagues in professional settings (conferences, instructors' weekly meetings, etc.) could be reasonably regarded as practices. With complicated identities such as being a female, a Chinese, a wife, a daughter, a Japanese learner, a Japanese language teacher, a PhD candidate and a researcher, it is impossible for me to present all my identities at one single moment. To my supervisors, I am a graduate student who is working on my dissertation; to the ETD editorial board, I am an associate editor and a Japanese linguistic researcher; to my students, I am a Japanese instructor. I actively choose to present some of my identities over others in various contexts.

Thus, in light of the complexities of LTIs, I view LTIs as a dynamic, fluid, and negotiated entity with features of "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 4) and as discursively constructed through historical, contemporary, and future-oriented perspectives within changing contexts.

Conclusion

This article reviewed studies of identity in general and the development process of identity research in the field of L2 teaching from the poststructural perspective. Based upon integrating the existing scholarly literature with my personal experiences, especially Barkhuizen's (2017) notions of LTIs as "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" (p. 4), I understand LTIs as dynamic, fluid, negotiated, and discursively constructed, all of which are determined by past experiences, affected contemporarily by momentary feelings, and guided by future-oriented beliefs within changing contexts.

By linking my teaching practices with my understanding of LTIs, I have gradually built several pictures about "how I came to this point", "who I am now" and "whom I want to become in the future" over the past few years. This has helped me in terms of not only classroom practices and pedagogical choices inside the classroom but also in my interaction and communication with my colleagues and students outside of the classroom. Through this literature review article, I hope to have emphasized the significance of LTI research, as well as to have demonstrated the importance of language teachers' self-recognition for better language education.

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PERSPECTIVES

Fostering an Ideal Environment for Part-Time Teachers: A Wishlist from a Part-Time University Teacher

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Part-time English teachers are an ever present and integral part of tertiary education in Japan. As of 2016, there were 184,273 full-time faculty members and 162,040 part-time instructors at the university level (Maita, 2018). Universities have increasingly looked to these "hijokins" to manage costs, make up for a lack of funding, and mitigate the effects of the decreasing enrollment population (Itakura, 2021).

Unfortunately, while the current ecosystem of university English teaching gives part-timers equal footing in terms of numbers, it is profoundly unequal where it really matters. To provide a realistic alternative, it is critical to imagine a better environment, one in which part-timers are given the conditions to thrive. In this paper, I therefore relate my teaching experiences—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and propose solutions to address inequities from a part-time teacher perspective.

The Good: New Life

My teaching career began at two medium-sized *eikaiwa* (conversation school) chains in the Kansai area. It was here that I honed my teaching skills, familiarized myself with different types of students, and experienced Japanese work culture firsthand. I learned many lessons, but as enjoyable as the position was, I hit a ceiling and decided to move on to more lucrative and challenging opportunities. The choices were either elementary or post-secondary schools, and I chose the latter.

The next stage of my career proceeded with classes at a vocational aviation college. My first time with a large group of students was nerve-wracking. But I persevered and gained the necessary experience to apply for additional part-time work at universities. At the same time, I slowly discovered my identity and teaching style. I also felt that my contributions to the curriculum and efforts were being recognized. I was part of these students' lives as they thought about their futures and entry into society.

Later on, I found out how rare full-time university positions were. The competition was intense and I needed at least two to three publications. It was an employer's market and it was tough to stand out in a pool of well-qualified applicants. I reassessed my situation and rationalized the advantages part-timers have over full-timers:

- a flexible schedule that when properly arranged can result in earnings comparable or more than some full-time positions,
- exemption from attending meetings and handling administrative duties, and
- opportunities to teach students of different levels, majors, interests, and nationalities.

Eventually, I thus shifted my preference from becoming a full-timer to settling down as a part-timer at a rotation of schools.

The Bad: Elusive Contentment

Being a part-time teacher also has its downsides. For instance, when I caught the

flu, I had to fully pay into the Japanese healthcare system and cover the succeeding monthly payments. Other realities of part-time teaching also began to surface: difficult class assignments and the exhausting shuttling back and forth between universities started to take their toll.

Furthermore, many of the problems that plagued conversation schools also became apparent in tertiary education, such as bureaucratic inefficiency, a lack of benefits, and a high turnover. My dawning disillusion resonated with Cullen's (2021) experience of having a very different idea of what it meant to teach at the university level before entering it full-time and realizing that the teaching part of EFL in university was not that different in content and expectation from teaching in an eikaiwa.

It was during this time when one of my favorite classes was rescinded due to the pandemic. I realized a part-time teacher has to accept their place in the teacher hierarchy; full-timers come first. This means financial precarity and job uncertainty for part-timers, who are often left wondering if their classes will be renewed in the following year.

The Ugly: Dangers of Being Left Out

It is a grisly truism that if a teacher's basic needs are not met, their job motivation decreases and their stress increases to dangerous levels. Coombe (as cited in Murray, 2013) observes that the teacher might then deal with the situation by ending their career, changing their roles or giving up duties, or changing their self-identity or focus. In addition, if the needs of teachers are marginalized, it can lead to disastrous consequences such as poor job performance and staff turnover (Tehseen & Ul Hadi, 2015), and even mental issues (Nagai et al., 2007). Part-time teachers also sometimes complain of stress due to forced use of paid holidays, even though these are purportedly at the teacher's discretion to use.

In my circle of part-timers, some have apparently given up on the system, returning to their home countries due to insufficient job opportunities or frustrations with the additional demands of online teaching. Contracts are not being renewed, and even for the lucky ones, a recurring theme for university academics is seeing their salaries barely increasing, even to match inflation (Itakura, 2021). Added to this precarious situation is the weak safety net for teachers brought about by the recent COVID-19 epidemic (Osumi, 2020). It is not a stretch to say that teachers, full- and part-timers alike, have reached a tipping point with the recent string of world events. It is unfortunate that the situation has reached this alarming point.

Six-Item Wishlist

I have been fortunate enough to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic relatively unscathed; however, these past few years have given cause to reflect on my experiences and reevaluate the state of my working conditions. I began to see my potential role as a part-time teacher who might move the discourse toward making things better for other part-timers. Some of these suggestions may seem excessive or too idealistic; nevertheless, they are worth exploring.

Small Monetary and Non-Monetary Benefits

Despite the ongoing financial straits, nickel and diming teachers' expenses is pointless, and institutions should try to be more generous for their own long-term preservation. In addition to covering transportation expenses, schools could leverage their user base to offer better subscription deals to part-time teachers for services such as the Adobe Suite and Microsoft Office or discounts on hardware as well. Holding financial planning seminars could help teachers manage their budgets. These suggestions, although not entirely free, are cost effective and would have a positive impact on teaching output.

Small conveniences in the workplace can sometimes be more important than

monetary compensation. Keeping the office stocked with snacks, beverages, and the latest periodicals would be appreciated. Greeting teachers on their birthdays or personally handing teachers their pay slips may seem trivial, but these gestures can mean a lot and show that part-timers are being thought of. Other unconventional ideas include offering part-timers lapel pins or other school merchandise to show school support.

Meaningful Online Communication

Regular communication and feedback among colleagues ensure a productive workplace and a prosperous career. I recommend two methods: online conferencing and message app groups. With online conference software such as Zoom or Google Meet, convenient weekly or monthly teacher gatherings can be held. These meetings could be formal or informal and include a variety of topics. These meetings could benefit a part-timer's knowledge and expand their network of contacts, which could prove useful for transitioning into full-time work.

LINE is Japan's most popular messaging service, and I have had positive experiences with teacher groups formed using this app. During my time in the groups, content has ranged from announcements, class management techniques, career guidance, and problem-solving advice. Interactions in the group have provided much needed stress release and convenient support from peers outside of the formal channels and office hours in school.

Mental Health Support

Mental health is an overlooked aspect of a teacher's well-being. This is especially true for teachers who are young or female (Kataoka et al., 2014). A pilot study of a stress-intervention program found that counseling improved coping skills, especially for newer and less experienced teachers (Shimazu et al., 2003). Institutions must consider this and have staff available that specialize in mental support. Schools should also promote physical health by giving free access to the campus gym, which would mitigate the problems of busy schedules and expensive gym fees.

Some teachers may also want to take more active roles as counselors, even unofficially. At the international college I work at, there is a teacher who excels in taking care of the well-being of the part-time teachers. She often asks how we are and goes the extra mile to check on our classes. She provides an immeasurable boost in self-esteem, which is crucial in crunch-time situations such as finals week or difficult-to-manage classes.

Mentorship Programs and Events

Socializing and networking opportunities onsite are a rare occurrence for part-time teachers. The tendency of part-timers to keep to themselves and leave quickly after class makes it difficult to socialize. Having said that, there is nothing stopping us from joining a teaching network organization such as JALT (Japanese Association of Language Teachers). However, it is a wasted opportunity to have people of similar interests and talent that share a workplace not to somehow be connected into a mutually beneficial relationship.

It would be preferable if schools take the initiative and help nurture relationships with an inhouse training program where full and part-timers are paired for a semester. Brown (1995) has talked about full-time teachers orienting part-timers, and a guest lecture option might build relationships and improve the reputation of the senior teacher (Porcaro, 2018). Feedback through classroom observations, lesson plans, or curriculum content will sharpen one's teaching skills. Furthermore, self-improvement adds to a teacher's self-confidence and skills and ultimately improves the quality of teaching and student experience.

Anonymous Evaluation Surveys

Schools at the end of each semester often ask students about the quality of teaching but rarely ask teachers about the quality of the administration. Moreover, teachers usually hold back their true feelings about their administration, mainly because of the potential workplace consequences. Therefore, schools must offer the opportunity for teachers to voice their concerns anonymously. Additionally, these surveys should include questions about compensation and working conditions along with requests for suggestions. Teachers' responses could prove invaluable for school management.

Collecting and discussing the survey results would give the administration an updated state of affairs and a great way to gauge the current sentiment of part-time teachers as it would likely include more opinions of the less vocal participants. The school could then address complaints and stem any potential problems before they became serious. Publicly releasing the results would provide transparency, and even if the feedback put the administration in a negative light, it would create an atmosphere of trust and accountability.

Publishing In-house and Access to Research Grants

Part-timers seeking to self-improve and become full-timers often face "publish or perish" pressures. Publishing proves arduous as many part-timers either lack the motivation or the tools when it comes to getting funding or guidance for publication work. In the midst of this problem, I suggest a new attitude, a "publish and cherish" mindset where teachers would look forward to writing and sharing their institutional knowledge and experiences with their fellow educators.

To accomplish this, schools should promote cooperation between teachers, both full- and part-time alike, to contribute to and produce academic literature. This cooperation could be assisted by introducing co-authoring teams, especially for teachers who are just starting out. In-house publications are a great starting point, and institutions could promote the sharing of research grants, or *kakenhi*, which provide the necessary financial resources to see research through. Any published work results in adding to the reputation of the university the part-timer is associated with, so this collaboration would likely be a win–win.

Conclusion

Japan's educational institutions will continue to face pressures on multiple fronts. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2012), Japan's total population, including foreign nationals, is expected to reach 124 million in 2025 and then decrease to 107 million in 2040. At the same time, the Japanese government and higher education institutions are also expected to improve student learning experiences in order to develop globally competitive human resources in the global economy.

As a result of dwindling school enrollments, Japanese universities will continue to downsize, so more part-timers are expected to join the ranks, comprising a bigger stake and having a greater influence. With more institutions increasingly relying on these types of teachers, part-timers will soon be shouldering half or more of the teaching responsibilities. It is crucial to make sure that they are satisfied with their working environment and conditions. Turnovers and mass departures could spell disaster for institutions who are already struggling with maintaining workplace morale and educational standards.

Part-time teachers are susceptible to disenfranchisement. Sooner or later universities will need to address this vulnerability. But when part-time teachers' needs are taken care of, they can find purpose and motivation, solidify their identity, and become indispensable to the

organization. A progressive and proactive approach toward changing certain aspects of the teaching workplace would have an immediate and transformative effect for both part-timers and full-timers.

In order to spark this change, I have attempted to share several suggestions in this article. My hope is such a transformation will eventually lead to a better quality of life for teachers and a better quality of education for students.

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