

1. Introduction





- This poster presents how **an online community** encourages **teacher development** in Japan.
- This is based on part of my Ph.D. study which aims at investigating a teacher's perceptions about her students' learning.

2. Teacher Forum

- A number of researchers (e.g. Hatch, Ahmed, Liberman, Faigenbaum, White and Mace, 2005) have emphasised the importance of a forum wherein teachers can exchange their ideas and experiences. In particular, Hatch (2006) focuses on the advancement of technology and argues that it will enable teachers to engage in dialogic interaction with other teachers, not only in face-to-face encounters but also through distance learning.

3. Data Collection

- (1) Aim: To trace how Ms. Tanaka continues her professional development.
- (2) Duration: 5 months
(November, 2007 - March, 2008)
- (3) Participants: 3 Japanese teachers of English (pseudonyms) and a researcher

 <p>Ms. Tanaka (Female)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 18 years of teaching experience - 3rd year (lower secondary level) 	 <p>Mr. Yamazaki (Male)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less than one year of teaching experience - 2nd year (lower secondary level)
 <p>Ms. Nakamura (Female)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 years of teaching experience - 2nd year (upper secondary level) 	 <p>Chika (Researcher) (Female)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 years of teaching experience

(4) Methods

- MIXI (a Japanese online social networking system)





- Follow-up Feedback via Email


4. Discussion with Samples of Interactive Dialogue among the Participants


4.1 Collaboration as a Tool for Teacher Development


- Mr. Yamazaki (a novice teacher) brings up the topic of textbooks, and Ms. Tanaka (an experienced teacher) emphasises the important role that collaboration/dialogue play in teacher development.


 >Ms. Tanaka
What is the textbook you use? (Yamazaki, 07/11/2007)

 The textbook I use is *Textbook-A* published by X. ... The sub-textbook (for exercise) is *Textbook-B*. All the students in the same year use it. The students have key to the exercises and are supposed to finish it at home. (Tanaka, 09/11/2007)

 >Ms. Tanaka
The textbook you use is quite high level, isn't it? I hear that it is difficult for teachers to deal with the textbook. In my school, we use *Textbook-C*. (Yamazaki, 09/11/2007)

 >Mr. Yamazaki
You are taking charge of the second year in the lower secondary school, right? What is the textbook like? I used to use a textbook which has a blue cover... I forgot the title of the textbook... (Chika, 09/11/2007)

 As to *Textbook-C*, I am not the one who uses this. The school is thinking of using this textbook, but I use *Textbook-D*. According to teachers who use *Textbook-C*, it is not easily dealt with... I think *Textbook-D* is not easy to deal with either. I am extremely struggling with how to teach it as the teacher's manual is not well organised. (Yamazaki, 12/11/2007)

 >Mr. Yamazaki
I think *Textbook-D* is more difficult than *Textbook-B*. We were also thinking of using *Textbook-D* but gave up. As to *Textbook-B*, it is fine unless you teach lessons in order. As you say, the teacher's manual is not well organised. I am taking charge of the streamed cohort [which is streamed by English only] with four teachers [including me]. We always confirm how to teach. As to the streamed cohort [which is the only cohort in the third year of the lower secondary school], I am the only teacher who takes charge of the cohort; it is easy. Nevertheless, I often think I want other teachers I can discuss with. (Tanaka, 13/11/2007)

4.2 Student-Centred Teaching Style

- Ms. Nakamura (an experienced teacher) demonstrates her conflicting ideas about the best way to teach/learn vocabulary and criticises the traditional teaching approach. Then Ms. Tanaka explains an inductive and student-centred teaching style which will help students develop their higher levels of thinking.

I take charge of a streamed cohort (high achieving students) but have a problem with the students who do not have the knowledge of either grammar or vocabulary. They are relatively obedient and I am desperately trying to make them memorise vocabulary by doing a small examination but it is not really ideal that students memorise vocabulary by the examination. I am thinking of introducing extensive reading as a part of my own study.

As they are the second year students in the upper secondary school, the students learn participial construction and emphasised sentence. However, their comprehension does not really stand out. I personally think their English comprehension has been blurred since they studied relative pronoun at the lower secondary school. I really feel the bad effect of the traditional English teaching. For example, a typical and traditional way of teaching relative pronoun is to ask students to combine two sentences into one. Because of this, students' comprehension seems to be blurred. Sorry. I have written my complaint...

(Nakamura, 26/11/2007)

Yeah, Ms. Nakamura. It is not entirely limited to relative pronouns. In my case, I asked the meaning of one sentence before having the students combine two sentences into one [which is the typical and traditional way.] The sentence included vocabulary which students can translate. Most students understood the meaning. Then I invited the students to explore the structure of the sentence. I asked them to divide the sentence into two in Japanese; they seemed to find out how the two sentences become one. After that, I increased the vocabulary by using "a girl who is doing X" and "a girl who is doing X and Y." In this way, I wrote one sentence and tried not to make students confused. I am wondering what will happen in the next examination.

In the streamed cohort, the students read a passage, guessing the meaning of vocabulary. Although I did not expect this, there were some students who have a good intuition and translate it somehow. This is not (only) the case with the streamed cohort but with the lower grade as well. I think if students work with many friends, they can make it. My problems are countless but I stopped writing this. I will inform you of the result of the TOEIC [Test of English for International Communication] exam which the students took in the next entry.

(Tanaka, 28/11/2007)

*Emphasis is added by the presenter.

5. Reflection

5.1 Professional/Personal Influences

- Ms. Tanaka felt a sense of safety and belonging to the community, and was encouraged to share her private as well as public selves.

Joining in the community encouraged me to work hard as I knew that there were teachers who worry and strive to devise effective ways of achieving their goals. Even if we were in different positions and worked at different environments [schools], we mutually shared our educational goals at a macro level. This also enabled me to gain a sense of security to know that there are many teachers who worry, make an effort and try to improve their teaching environment. This encouraged me to do my best.

(Tanaka's Follow-up Feedback, 02/04/2008)

5.2 A Potential of an Online Community

- An online community will enable teachers to collaborate to work towards their professional development across schools.

I think the advantage of the community is that we can explore what an English education could be like in Japan, share our ideas, open our detailed problems and give advice from the perspectives of various schools and positions. I expect a community to be a place where we can exchange our ideas and progress by learning and teaching foreign languages wherever and whenever we are.

(Tanaka's Follow-up Feedback, 02/04/2008)

6. Conclusion

- The study provides evidence of how an online community supports professional teacher development.
- The community became a place where professionals mutually engaged in dialogues, shared their ideas and developed an awareness of common problems and concerns.
- An online community within Japanese culture, which values private and public selves, empowered professionals to overcome the barrier between their private and professional selves across schools.
- This study suggests the possibility of teacher empowerment in terms of collaboration and professional reflection.

References

- Hatch, T. (2006). *Into the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hatch, T., Ahmed, D., Lieberman, D., White, M. E., and Mace, D. H. P. (eds.). (2005). *Going Public with Our Teaching: An Anthology of Practice*. New York and London: Teacher College, Columbia University.