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An On-going Study Investigating Teacher Thinking of JTEs: A tale of two teaching cultures

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In this poster session, we have reevaluated the results of our two preceding surveys on Japanese junior high school English teachers' thinking (Takaki and Laskowski, 1998, 1999) by conducting the same survey on foreign language teachers in Montana, USA. The comparative analysis of the surveys has indicated several emerging themes: teacher priorities, unique problems for foreign language teachers, professional development obstacles, teacher collaboration, university pre-service training, and university roles in teacher development. Results showing significant similarities and differences between the two educational cultures are presented, and their influences on teaching, especially in the Japanese context, are discussed in connection with the recent national curriculum policy that advocates more communicative language teaching in junior and senior high schools. We believe studies that explore teachers' thought processes and behaviors for why teachers are doing what they are doing in teaching will help them improve on their teacher development in the long run.

本ポスター・セッションでは、98年と99年に実施した日本における中学校英語科教員の意識調査の結果を再検討するために、同様の調査を学校・教員文化を

異にする米国モンタナ州の外国語担当教員を対象に実施した。本比較調査を通して、外国語〈英語〉教員が職務のどこに優先権を持たせているか、彼らに特有の問題があるとすればそれは何か、彼らの資質の向上を阻害しているものがあるとすればそれは何か、彼らを取り巻く環境における協働的研修及び支援体制の実態はどうか、大学における外国語〈英語〉教員養成の問題点は何か、そして外国語〈英語〉教員の現職研修に大学が果たす役割は何かといった問題が提起された。本論では、二つの異なった環境における外国語担当教員の意識に関する類似性と異質性について明らかにするとともに、それらが教員の指導に与える影響について考察し、より実践的な英語教育を唱導する日本の文部科学省の方針と現場教員の実態との関連において考慮すべきことついても論じる。

This is the third part of our on-going investigations into the teaching world of Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) at the lower secondary level. At the 1998 Omiya JALT Conference we reported the results of our first quantitative survey on 56 Kumamoto junior high school JTEs' thinking and beliefs, and offered the following results: a) an emerging picture of an "educational culture or teaching culture" in which JTEs work (see teaching priorities below), and b) that this culture, specific to JTEs, should be further explored on its own terms to better understand its influences on teacher perceptions and their actions in the classroom. In our second study, presented at the 1999 Maebashi JALT Conference, qualitative data collected from observations and interviews of three JTEs were analyzed. We found that a rigid curriculum created an over-reliance on the Ministry of Education authorized textbook, and a perception of pressure to prepare students for tests. Additionally, there were concerns about slow learners, and a higher priority for guidance and non-academic duties. In the third study, presented at a poster session in the 2001 Kitakyushu JALT Conference, we reevaluated the results of our original survey on JTEs by conducting the same survey in a western environment with 23 MFLTs (foreign language teachers in secondary schools in Montana, USA). A comparative analysis on the results of the surveys indicate several emerging themes: *teacher priorities, unique problems for foreign language teachers, professional development obstacles, teacher collaboration, university pre-service training, and university roles in teacher development*. Results showing significant similarities and differences of the two educational cultures, and their influences on teaching are presented.

Teacher Priorities

The teachers were asked to rank, in order of priority, five different school responsibilities. We find that these work-related duties are typical representations found in teaching cultures of lower secondary school teachers throughout Japan (Fukuzawa, 1996; Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999; Takaki and Laskowski, 1998),

and we wanted to see how they compare with an educational culture in which American teachers work. In the following item, respondents were asked to rank the duties from two perspectives: officially (*tatemae*) and in reality (*honne*). They were also asked to rate their performance in each duty under the category of *satisfaction*.

1. As an (E)FL teacher rank in order of priority the following for each category:

	Officially (*Tatemae*)	Reality (*Honne*)	Satisfaction
Teach English effectively			
Student guidance/ discipline			
Homeroom management			
Club activities advising			
Committee involvement			

The results in Charts 1 and 2 (see Appendix) indicate that, while JTEs are remarkably inconsistent in all categories of *officially, reality*, and *satisfaction* regarding their teacher priorities, MFLTs are not. In regards to the first two categories, this is due to the Japanese culture where they traditionally distinguish *tatemae* (ideally or what one is expected to say in public and *honne* (what one actually feels). Consequently, for JTEs subject teaching is much lower in the *reality* category while *homeroom management* is in "reality" the highest priority, followed by *student guidance*. On the other hand, MFLTs, working in an American educational system, are not as concerned about *homeroom management* or other non-academic duties. Thus, subject teaching remains the highest priority in each category. This explains, as Okano and Tsuchiya (1999) claim, the Japanese teacher culture, where teachers are constantly encouraged to mingle with students, being involved in both students' cognitive and emotional/physical/mental development. Influences of the teaching culture on instruction are seen in the following comment:

> I'm responsible for students so that I have to think about them. I am *always* thinking about students and how I can manage them. I wish English could be my first priority, but actually I'm spending most of my time doing other things for students. (Female, JTE, five years of experience)

A teaching culture that requires JTEs to spend a lot of their time on various responsibilities besides

teaching their subject can cause disturbing outcomes. For example, JTEs may feel they are being 'spread too thinly' across the curriculum, as *satisfaction* among them is significantly lower than that of MFLTs in almost all of the listed priorities. This is made clearer in the results of the following survey items.

Unique Problems

In the following, we wanted to learn how foreign language (FL) teachers view themselves in comparison to their colleagues who teach other subjects:

2. Compared with teachers of other subjects at your school, do you agree that (E)FL teachers have unique problems? (5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree)

Table 1: JTEs' perceptions of uniqueness

5	4	3	2	1
21%	42%	16%	5%	9%

Table 2: MFLTs' perceptions of uniqueness

5	4	3	2	1
73%	14%	9%	5%	0%

In Tables 1 and 2, both groups strongly agree that they have unique problems compared with other subject teachers. However, reasons for why they have problems are quite different:

Table 3: Responses representing reasons for uniqueness

JTEs		MFLTs	
Poor linguistic ability	41%	Not a credited course	32%
Methodologies/Materials	36%	FL is far from reality	22%
Difficulty of teaching EFL	17%	No Local/State support	16%
Social institutional pressure	6%	Lack of students motivation	16%
		Students' level is too low	16%

In Table 3 JTEs' comments were mostly related to their 'poor linguistic ability' in English as their greatest reason for why they felt uniquely different than their colleagues. However, MFLTs did not mention a lack of FL competence. For MFLTs it is the pervasive apathetic attitudes about FL learning that bothers them. Surprisingly, most secondary school students in Montana do not get credit towards graduation when taking FL classes. On the other hand, English is a required course and considered in Japan as vital for higher school examinations.

Professional Development Obstacles

In the following, we further address constraints imposed on teachers.

3. Write two or three things that you believe have prevented you from becoming a better (E)FL teacher:

Table 4: *Perceptions on what has prevented teachers from becoming better teachers:*

JTEs		MFLTs	
School Responsibilities	69%	Lack of time	28%
Myself	24%	Lack of school support	23%
Other	7%	Few chances to use FL	21%
		Lack of training	10%
		Low student motivation	8%
		Isolation from colleagues	8%
		Myself	2%

Table 4 shows that nearly 70% of JTEs said their non-academic responsibilities (see Chart 1) were a major hindrance to their development and about 25% of them blamed their lack of self-motivation, etc. Whereas MFLTs painted a picture of a schedule significantly marred by a lack of time for reflection and as in Table 3 mostly blamed apathetic attitudes toward studying a FL, the school and wider community for the lack of support instead of themselves.

Teacher Collaboration

Over the years, studies (Fullan, 1993; Knezevic and Scholl, 1996) have demonstrated the positive results of collaboration in teacher development. Thus, JTEs/MFLTs were asked to respond to the following:

4. How often do you discuss teaching methods, ideas, techniques, and classroom management with colleagues, other teachers, professors, etc.? (5=very often, 1= never)

Table 5: *JTEs' responses on teacher collaboration*

5	4	3	2	1
0%	18%	40%	36%	0

Table 6: *MFLTs' responses on teacher collaboration*

5	4	3	2	1
9%	35%	39%	17%	0

The results in Tables 5 and 6 indicate that MFLTs talk with their colleagues about teaching practices more than JTEs. However, JTEs probably talk to colleagues more about non-academic duties as this is more of a

priority at school (see Charts 1 and 2). This reluctance to talk about teaching practices, according to Takaki and Laskowski (1998), is relative to the high status and expected competence, ('Teacher as a knower') attributed to teachers in Japan once they enter the profession. Consequently, when it comes to discussions about instructional practices, as our results show, JTEs are more professionally isolated than MFLTs.

University Teacher Training

In the next items, the emphasis is on how teachers feel about the roles universities have played and can play in their teaching practices.

5) How much do you think your teaching training at the university has been useful for your teacher development? (5=very useful, 1=not useful)

Table 7: *JTEs' responses on usefulness of university pre-service training*

5	4	3	2	1
3%	14%	28%	31%	16%

Table 8: *MFLTs' responses on usefulness of university pre-service training*

5	4	3	2	1
17%	17%	17%	22%	22%

Approximately one-third of MFLTs felt their university pre-service training was useful, whereas less than one-fifth of JTEs felt their university training was useful (see Tables 7 and 8). Moreover, almost a half of both groups felt it was not useful. The results show that both sides ratify each other's feeling that no amount of preparation as a student adequately prepared one to stand in front of a classroom.

University Roles in Teacher Development

Teachers were asked to make two or three choices in the following item:

6) What roles do you think universities can play in teacher development?

Table 9: *University roles for in-service teacher development*

	JTEs	MFLTs
Intensive language improvement	44%	32%
Materials development	13%	19%
On-going evening/weekly/ monthly training sessions	28%	16%
MA for in-service teachers	9%	10%
Distance learning	9%	9%
Teacher Center	13%	9%
Other	5%	5%

Table 9 shows almost half of the responses (44%) of JTEs and almost one-third (32%) of MFLTs pertained to language improvement courses. This result shows that one of the largest roles for universities in FL teacher development is to give teachers target language training. The higher result of JTEs especially corresponds to an earlier response to item two, in which almost an equal amount (41%) felt their biggest problem in teaching was their language ability. In the other results, there are no major differences between the two groups in their expectations from universities.

Analysis and Implications

There are several significant differences between JTEs and MFLTs that emerged from the survey results. Item one shows how different teaching priorities reflect a tale of two distinct teaching cultures and their influences on teaching practices. For JTEs, the subject they teach is not the main priority as concerns for other school responsibilities, mainly those centering on students, occupy their teaching day. For MFLTs, it is their subject teaching that occupies most of their time, and responsibilities that center on students outside of the classroom are minimal concerns. In items two and three, the survey further revealed that JTEs felt their target language abilities were poor and that school responsibilities have prevented them from becoming better teachers. The implication is that a teaching culture that places less of an emphasis on subject teaching is taking its toll on teacher performance and development. In the case of MFLTs, limitations were not due to their language abilities or school responsibilities as much as it was working in an educational culture that is lukewarm to foreign language learning. Item four demonstrated that MFLTs talk much more about teaching with their colleagues compared to JTEs. However, JTEs probably talk with colleagues more about non-academic duties, which are their priorities. This implies that JTEs may feel more professionally isolated (at least in terms of subject teaching) in their schools. Furthermore, when it came to their university pre-service training, as reported in item five, MFLTs were more positive about the usefulness of their training compared to JTEs. However, almost half of both groups felt that the training was not useful. The

latter result adds to the controversy in many educational cultures concerning the effectiveness of pre-service training in universities. However, both groups, in item six, saw target language improvement as the biggest role universities could play in their professional development.

Additionally, we encouraged those who had comments to write them down, and we posted those comments on our poster display board. During the poster session, a Japanese EFL teacher expressed interest in item one, *teaching priorities*, as a means to explore teaching cultures, and she encouraged us to widen our database by continuing this study with teachers of other educational cultures. An English teacher from America, who teaches in junior high schools in the Tokyo area, reported that our findings supported the attitudes and situations of JTEs with whom he worked. He felt they explained why JTEs seem to avoid spending time with him to plan lessons and talk about teaching practices, or lack any enthusiasm to go to workshops and conferences, such as JALT, if they are not required to do so. One JET teacher from Nagasaki put the above comments into perspective when she wrote the following:

> The issue of teaching priorities really struck a chord with what happens in my junior high school. One of the JTEs I work with is always very enthusiastic about English teaching, but really… as long as the students are happy in his class, that's enough. So that means no lesson planning, no material supplementary to the text, canceling class in favor of club activities or general studies (*sogo-teki na gakushu no jikan*) and little utilization of his ALT. He seems much happier in his other duties.

Conclusion

To sum up the three studies conducted so far, we feel exploratory research on teachers' thinking and beliefs about teaching contribute to teacher awareness. Hopefully the implications of these studies will give teachers opportunities to pause and reflect on why they are doing what they are doing in teaching and that this will help them improve on their teacher development. For JTEs, we believe this is important in the long run rather than rushing them to be ready for communicative language teaching techniques and procedures, advocated by the Ministry of Education in the new course of study which started officially in April, 2002. We also feel that studies on the teacher thought processes and influences of the teaching culture will be useful for researchers as well—especially since until recently research on teacher behaviors and thinking in the Japanese context has been almost "taboo" as Kanatani (1995) has pointed out.

In our fourth attempt, we are planning a comparative survey with teaching cultures within the Asian region, and teachers and scholars in Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam have already volunteered or agreed to help us with the survey.

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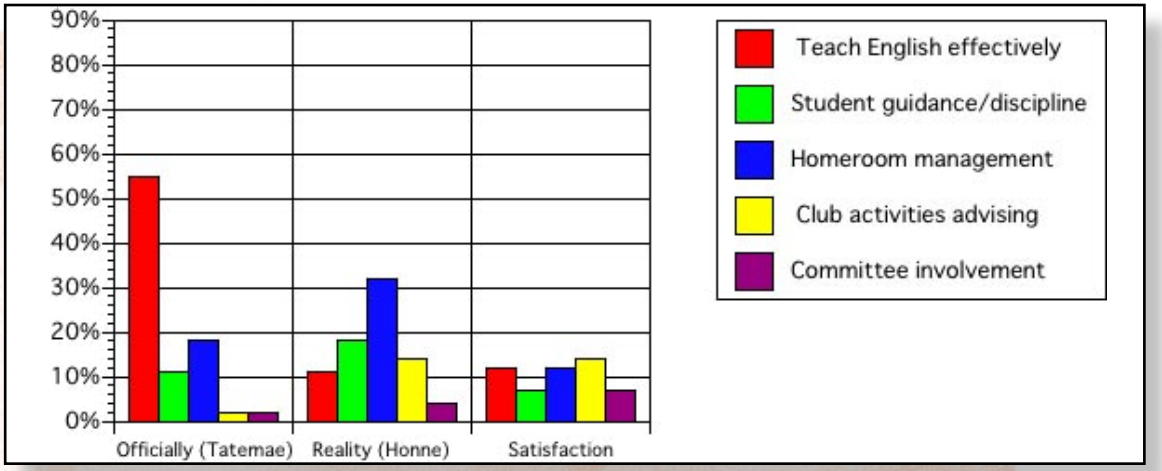
Appendix 1: *JTE's Priorities*



Appendix 2: *MFLT's Priorities*