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Multi-membership in Communities of Practice: An EFL Teacher's Professional Development

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Abstract

This study investigates the professional development of one EFL teacher, Gen, through narrative analysis and the notion of community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This study addresses two questions:

1. How did a Japanese high school teacher generate context-appropriate pedagogy?
2. How did multi-membership in CoPs influence this teacher's learning?

Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews. Gen's story reveals that he belongs to multiple CoPs and that in order to generate context-appropriate pedagogy, he learns from other members of his CoPs by talking to them, observing their lessons, and sharing teaching activities. Gen's story also indicates that members of local CoPs who have TESOL backgrounds connect him to the "English-speaking Western TESOL" community (Holliday, 2005). These findings highlight the importance of teachers belonging to multiple CoPs. This study also suggests the need for reconceptualizing teacher education from a knowledge transmission metaphor to a participant metaphor.

Introduction

A *community of practice* (CoP) is defined as a group of people who share social practices and work together toward common goals (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Learning can be considered active participation in the practice itself and a lot of professional development takes place as a result of participation in particular CoPs. A CoP perspective may prove useful in helping us understand teachers' learning in practice and reconceptualizing teacher education (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; 2004). With this in mind, I used a specific CoP as a conceptual framework for my study of professional development among Japanese high school teachers in multiple communities.

Background

Since the 1980s, Japan has experienced a growing need for communicative English skills as a result of globalization. To meet this need, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) set out to reform English education in Japan. In 1987, MEXT established the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, through which approximately 6,000 foreign college graduates [1] are currently invited each year to work as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in elementary and secondary schools across the country. MEXT revised the *Course of Study* (national curriculum guidelines) in 1989 and again in 1999 to promote the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) [2] by teachers (MEXT, 1989, 1999). In addition, Japan's business leaders put pressure on MEXT to educate the Japanese population to the point where it could conduct daily conversations in English (Erikawa, 2009), which resulted in the introduction of a five-year action plan to cultivate Japanese individuals with English abilities (MEXT, 2003). In 2003-2007, funds from the action plan budget supported local Boards of Education in providing intensive English teacher training programs. Approximately 60,000 secondary public school teachers attended these programs, and university professors and language school instructors were invited to teach as lecturers. [3]

These innovations by MEXT appeared to conflict with Japanese teachers' traditional practices—namely, the grammar-translation method, called *yakudoku*. According to a survey conducted when the intensive program ended in 2007, secondary school teachers found it difficult to connect the lectures given by university professors or language school teachers to their classroom practices, with only 25% of respondents reporting that their lessons had become more communicative as a result of the program (Shineigokyoiku-kenkyuukai, 2008). Similarly, a survey conducted at the end of 2006 reported that Japanese high school teachers rarely used CLT (Nishino, 2009a).

In other countries also, teaching methods developed in the West, such as CLT, are often difficult to introduce into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (see, for example, Li, 1998) and the need for locally appropriate methodologies has been advocated by scholars (e.g., Holliday, 1994; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Holliday (1994) proposed appropriate methodologies that are culturally-sensitive and suit tertiary, secondary, and primary educational (TESEP) settings, where students generally take foreign languages as required courses (p. 71). Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) suggest that appropriate pedagogy should prepare learners for both local and global contexts. More radically, some scholars advocate the view that there is no best method (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1990). For instance, Bax (2003) maintains that the dominance of CLT has brought about a neglect of the local context. Bax thus proposes a "context approach," whereby other methods and approaches are seen as equally valid.

Also to be noted is the fact that Japanese high school teachers have attempted to develop communicative-oriented methodologies [4] that would fit their teaching contexts (Nishino, 2009a). Using these methodologies, many high school teachers

provide students with communicative activities, yet their lessons remain generally teacher-centered and textbook-based. Likewise, teachers in other parts of East Asia provide communicative activities as additional elements to skill training and modify CLT to fit their particular teaching contexts (Ho & Wong, 2004). Nonetheless, little is known about the processes through which teachers develop locally appropriate methodologies. Similarly, little is known about the influence of their teaching and learning experiences on that development. To fill this gap, this study investigates how a Japanese high school teacher of English generated locally appropriate communicative methodology in his professional CoPs. In the next section, I discuss the notion of CoP in greater depth and review previous research.

Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as a process whereby newcomers participate in activities with particular groups of people by observing and imitating old-timers and gradually establishing identities as full members of the group. According to Wenger (1998), we all belong to multiple CoPs that are characterized by three dimensions: mutual engagement (members' interaction), joint enterprise (products which result from members' negotiation of meanings), and shared repertoire (symbols or artifacts that belong to the practices of the community).

In CoPs, practice is co-constructed through the negotiation of meaning organized through a dynamic interplay between participation and reification (Wenger, 1998). Participation includes "the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises" (Wenger, 1998, p. 55). Reification refers to the process of "giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" (p. 58). Both participation and reification interact with each other and generate a negotiation of meaning whereby learning occurs. For instance, even if a book is present (reification), one cannot be involved in learning unless one reads and thinks through it (participation).

According to Wenger (1998), there are two types of connections linking CoPs: "brokering" and "boundary objects." Brokers are members of multiple communities and introduce elements of one CoP into another (Wenger, 1998). Brokers also keep a distance from the core of the community in order to hold a different perspective, yet they are legitimized as peripheral members. Boundary objects are artifacts such as books and documents, around which the members of the different CoPs can organize their activities. Practices in different CoPs can influence each other through these two forms of connections (Wenger, 1998).

Using the notion of CoP as a theoretical framework, educational researchers have investigated teachers' learning in communities including online learning (Carr & Chambers, 2006; Lockyer, Patterson, Rowland, & Hearne, 2002), collaboration in educational reform (Cobb, McClain, Lamberg, & Dean, 2003; Rust, 2006), and

professional development through situated learning (Putnam & Borko, 2008). Cobb et al. (2003) reported that math curriculum reform was successfully implemented in four middle schools in the United States as a result of a "school leadership community" (p. 16) playing a brokering role and connecting the curriculum coordinators to a math teachers' community in each school.

In the field of TESOL, it has been reported that informal study groups support and enhance teachers' professional development (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 1998). Tsui (2006) investigated the complex process of identity formation in CoPs in a Chinese EFL teacher. In addition, the recent spread of virtual online communities, in which teachers can share their pedagogical knowledge (Rogers, 2000; Stevens, 2005) should also be noted. These studies indicate that teachers' knowledge and practice construction are not only individual but also social. However, none of these studies focused on teachers' multi-membership in local CoPs. To fill this gap, I aim to investigate Japanese high school teachers' professional development in multiple CoPs. My study addresses two questions:

1. How did a Japanese high school teacher develop context-appropriate methodology?
2. How did multi-membership in CoPs influence this teacher's learning?

Data Collection

This study is part of a larger study in which I selected as participants four experienced high school English teachers known to me personally. For this paper, I chose one participant, Gen (pseudonym), who belonged to two teachers' associations. When I asked him to be a participant in my study, he had 25 years teaching experience. I had met him several times before conducting this study because we had co-authored three high school English textbooks.

I observed Gen's class three times: on February 15, 2006, January 24, 2007, and February 16, 2007. I video-recorded the lessons and took field notes during the lessons. I then wrote observation accounts based on both video recordings and field notes. After each observation, I interviewed Gen in Japanese. I also conducted a follow-up interview on February 17, 2010. The total length of the interviews was 5.5 hours. In the interviews, I asked Gen about his learning experiences, his professional history, and other information about his school. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Data also included Gen's published work, emails, teaching materials, his students' worksheets, and a 30-minute telephone interview with his wife, conducted on February 24, 2010.

Data Analysis

When I analyzed the observation data, I repeatedly read my observation accounts with a focus on both Gen and students' activities and utterances. I also watched the video and added to my observation accounts. I then summarized the

procedure of the lessons and described the classroom activities. I used the observation accounts to understand the interview data more deeply.

To interpret the interview data, I used narrative analysis. The advantages of using narratives in educational research have been noted by a number of researchers (e.g., Beattie, 1995; Bruner, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Doyle, 1997; Johnson, 2006). Beattie suggests that narrative studies could bring new meaning to professional development in a teacher's life. In addition, Doyle (1997) states that narratives capture the meaning and perspective of teachers and their learning. Narratives can be a significant tool for interpreting teachers' experiences and for giving meaning to them.

I repeatedly listened to the interviews, read interview transcripts, took notes in the margins, and identified important experiences that seemed to have influenced Gen's teaching practices. I then developed his learning and teaching experiences into a short story. The story was read by Gen himself, who made a few corrections about some facts I had misunderstood. I translated the sections in which I quoted his words directly into English and asked him to check if the translation conveyed the meaning he had intended.

The interpretation of narratives was conducted through the collaborative work of a teller (participant), a listener/analyst (researcher), and a reader (Riessman, 1993). Thus, it is likely that my experiences of learning and teaching in Japanese secondary schools, studying in a TESOL graduate program at a university in the United States, and currently offering teaching methodology courses at Japanese universities strongly influenced my interpretation of the narrative data as well as the entire project.

Gen's Lessons

Gen taught at Asama Agricultural High School (pseudonym), a public vocational institution in Central Japan. Before teaching at this vocational school, he taught at two general (non-vocational) high schools. Gen reported that the students' average academic level at Asama Agricultural High School was low. Students' low academic achievement is a serious problem for vocational high schools because over the past few decades, students who cannot enter general high schools have gone to vocational high schools in Japan (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999). Gen complained that many students had not studied English grammar and vocabulary in junior high school. Thus, he felt constrained to use a very basic textbook he had co-authored (with me) as it allowed the learners to review the alphabet and the canonical word order of English.

I observed first-year "English I" classes, which were part of a required course that aimed to improve the students' four communicative skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The students attended a 50-minute English I class twice a week. Students who participated in the first observation (Classroom 1-A) were different from those who participated in the second and third observations (Classroom 1-B). Topics for the lessons in the textbook included a famous

Japanese comic book writer (the first and second classes) and blue whales (the third).

There were 23 students (16 boys and seven girls) in Classroom 1-A and 24 students (17 boys and seven girls) in Classroom 1-B. Both classes were arranged as traditional teacher-centered classes and Gen assigned the students their seats.

In every lesson I observed, Gen devoted the first 25-30 minutes to reviewing a passage in the textbook that the students had studied in the previous lesson. In the first review task, the students took part in a five-minute choral reading. The second task was a quiz on the students' understanding of the passage: reading comprehension check, vocabulary review, and English composition, using sentence structures learned in the previous lesson. While the students were writing their answers, Gen walked around the class and talked to almost all of the students, giving them feedback in Japanese. Gen then checked the answers with the students. The quiz took 20-25 minutes.

After the review activities, Gen explained the content of a new passage in the textbook. In the first class I observed, he told the story in Japanese. In the second and third classes, he explained the story in English. He first handed out a worksheet in which grids for key words and a Japanese summary were provided. A number was placed next to each line, following the order of the sentences in the textbook. Gen simplified the text, repeated and paraphrased the sentences, added information, wrote important words on the blackboard, and code-switched so that the students could comprehend the passage written in English. While they listened, the students wrote down key words on the handout. Following Gen's explanation, they helped each other in writing Japanese summaries of the passage. While they were writing the summaries, Gen walked around the class to give help to students individually again.

In addition to repeating and paraphrasing, Gen asked questions in English to enhance the students' listening comprehension. For example, while explaining that there were two types of whales, Gen said, "Group 1 have teeth (pointing to his own teeth). Group 2 have no teeth. Group 1 eat fish or other animals. How about Group 2? What do you think? If they don't eat fish or animals, what do you think they eat? Do you know?" One student voluntarily responded: "Milk!" Gen said to the class, "*Miruku ka* (Milk, well…). When they are babies, they eat milk from mother [sic]. When they become adult, *miruku janai wa na* (not milk, right?)." As this example shows, Gen's oral introduction involved interaction with the students.

The procedure of Gen's lessons is summarized in Table 1. Gen and his students interacted at least partly in English during the oral introduction. Throughout the activity, the students understood the content of the passage in the textbook, and in the next class, they connected spoken English to the written passage. Gen's explanation and questions were very easy, but I was amazed that agricultural high school students were able to understand the explanation and responded to him in English. (I wondered how he discovered this methodology.)

Table 1. Procedure of Gen's Lessons

Activity	Time (minutes)
Review (choral reading)	5
Review (quiz)	20~25
Oral Introduction (new section)	20
Choral reading and translation (new section)	Next lesson

Gen's Story

Learning Foreign Languages

Gen grew up in the prefecture where Asama Agricultural High School is located and he studied at a public junior high school there. Gen stated that at that time, attending English classes meant "reading" (aloud) and "writing" (copying English sentences). He also stated that he memorized grammar rules and vocabulary in class and that he copied English sentences into his notebook for homework every day.

Gen entered a public high school in 1974, where he took reading, grammar, and composition classes. He said, "The English courses were taught by using what was called pure *gura-tora* [grammar-translation method]" (12/5/2006). [5] As in junior high school, his teachers never provided communicative activities. A teacher from a foreign country visited his high school once in the three years that Gen taught at the school, but the students in his class just listened to his English. Gen said: "My teacher could not make himself understood in English when speaking to the native speaker" (2/15/2006). Even in composition classes, the main activity involved translating Japanese sentences into English. Gen reported that his own way of teaching might have been influenced by these learning experiences, given that he usually provides students with reading aloud and translation activities.

After becoming an English teacher, Gen and his wife studied Korean for roughly one year. Gen remembered the class and said, "I felt very frustrated when I was unable to pronounce Hangul letters. If learners couldn't read at all, they wouldn't feel like studying the language any more" (1/24/2007). As a result of this experience, he wanted to enable his students to connect English spelling to the pronunciation. Gen's provision of choral reading tasks seems partly due to this experience.

Teacher Training and Teaching Experience

Gen majored in English literature in college and took teacher education courses. He said that the courses were not useful for teaching. Moreover, during his

teaching practicum, his supervisor made no comments and gave him no advice. However, he said that he enjoyed the practicum a great deal and had decided to become a teacher by the end of it.

Gen obtained his teaching license in 1981. At the beginning of his career, Gen used his energy mainly to assist student club activities. However, he changed his way of thinking due to the influence of his wife, Michi (pseudonym). Gen met Michi in 1986 at a meeting of the New English Teachers' Association (pseudonym) and they married in 1992. Michi was a high school English teacher with a master's degree in TESOL, who was also interested in peace education. Gen said, "I talked to her. We talked. I saw what she was doing. We did activities together in the Teachers' Association…. She had an impact on my views of English education, my English skills as well, and my knowledge" (2/15/2006). As a result of Michi's influence, Gen tried to improve his English proficiency, learn from his students, and teach English more effectively. Interestingly, Michi also said in her telephone interview that she had learned from Gen when they discussed problems they were having with their students' counseling.

Michi also helped Gen learn about TESOL and second language acquisition (SLA). Gen read Michi's books and, among them, he found a translated version of Dörnyei (2001) particularly interesting. He said, "I thought that Dörnyei could publish books and become a professor because he was good at putting things together. Teachers all know about these strategies…but the book covers all the strategies teachers are using…very useful for me" (1/24/2007). Gen seemed to confirm that he was using various strategies that had been discussed in the professional literature. Thus, the book may have led him from tacit to procedural professional knowledge.

One year after Gen met Michi, the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program started. Around that time, many Japanese teachers did not know how to team-teach and they had difficulty communicating with Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) working in their schools. Gen was one of those teachers. He had to create an English sentence in his mind first and then say it, so he could not sustain real-time conversation. Gen thought that he should improve his listening and speaking skills in order to team-teach effectively, so he repeatedly listened to tape-recorded English texts every day. He visited the ALTs' home once or twice a month, and sometimes stayed overnight to talk about education with them. In their team-taught classes, he carefully observed the way they taught. Gen reported that although the ALTs on the JTE Program had no TESOL background, they were familiar with student-centered instruction. Gen also said that they worked together when preparing their team-taught classes.

Gen continued these efforts for three or four years until he realized that he had little difficulty in communicating with the ALTs and in using English in class. As he reported, "Students read the textbook passage and translated it as before, but I became more sensitive to pronunciation, more careful about it" (2/15/2006). In responding to my question about how the ALTs influenced his teaching, Gen said, "Regarding the use of English, they affected me. There is a lot that I've learned

from them. For example, what words to use and what expressions to use" (2/15/2006). He continued, "I learned how to interact with students. Seeing [the ALTs] encouraging my students and trying to draw their attention, I thought I had to encourage and entertain my students more." Evidently, Gen learned not only English but also how to interact with students and use English in class from the ALTs. Moreover, Gen influenced the ALTs themselves. He said, "I advised the ALTs to work hard as a *kyouin* (teacher). I thought that I would get along with them as teachers in the same position" (2/17/2010). Gen was happy to report that one of the ALTs he worked with had emailed him to report that his senior teacher enthusiastically used activities as Gen had used them. There appeared to be mutual learning among Gen and the ALTs.

Gen learned from his Japanese colleagues and from the ALTs. At the end of the 1980s, Gen was working with a colleague whose lessons he thought were very effective. Gen saw the teacher approaching students she had just met for the first time, saying, "I will definitely make you understand English." He recalled this and said, "I was shocked by the teacher's attitude toward her students. I had never treated my students like that. I had often thought, "How come my students don't even understand this easy stuff?" (2/15/2006).

Because Gen believed that teachers could learn from their colleagues, he invited them to the first class I observed. At that time, there were only three English teachers at his school, including Gen. Gen wanted to improve his teaching skills by getting feedback from his colleagues. Gen said that class observation is the best way to learn about pedagogy. However, because Gen and his colleagues almost always taught during the same class periods, they rarely had the opportunity to observe each other's classes. Nonetheless, Gen shared his classroom practices with his colleagues in different ways, such as talking with them about their lessons and sharing handouts and materials he had developed.

While he appreciated this informal learning from his colleagues, Gen did not find formal workshops held by the local Board of Education useful. Therefore, he voluntarily joined the New English Teachers' Association in 1986, where he first met Michi. The association held workshops and class observations and invited advisors and lecturers to the meetings. Advisors were typically university professors but were also sometimes famous peace advocates or experts in global education. One of the advisors who made especially impressive presentations was Professor Kunihiro, who claimed that we need "motion memory" when mastering skills such as swimming, driving, and language, and that reading aloud is crucial in order to activate motion memory. Gen listened to Professor Kunihiro's lecture twice and talked to him personally. When I asked about the most effective way for his students to learn English, Gen answered, "Reading aloud. Umm, like *shikan roodoku* [focused oral reading] proposed by Professor. Kunihiro, doing it repeatedly, I guess" (2/15/2006). Evidently, Gen believes that reading aloud was crucial not only for connecting English spelling to pronunciation but also for foreign language learning as a whole.

Gen had also joined the Global Teachers' Association (pseudonym) approximately 20 years before the first interview and attended the meetings more than ten times. Gen was impressed by the MERRIER Approach [6], including the Oral Introduction. In the MERRIER Approach classroom, teachers explain written texts orally through repeating and paraphrasing with the help of gestures and realia. The approach was proposed by Professor Watanabe, who developed it for the Japanese EFL context based on Krashen's Input Theory (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) and his own teaching experience. Professor Watanabe was a university professor and had studied TESOL at a university in the United States. He also had experience teaching in high schools. Gen said, "Mr. Watanabe is very good, good at giving an English lesson using English. He is a *leader* [sic] in our prefecture." He continued, "I've known about the MERRIER Approach for 20 years, but I couldn't use it. My ability was not high enough…I went to a seminar and observed model lessons" (2/16/2007).

In the first interview, Gen said, "I want to increase the amount of English I use in class" (2/15/2006). He thought that the MERRIER Approach would enable him to do this; however, in order to accomplish this, he had to learn to help low proficiency students understand the textbook through English. Then he thought of numbering the sentences and having students write down key words while listening. Gen finally started to use the MERRIER Approach in April 2007. He was surprised that most of the students understood his English and that his own speaking skills improved through using this approach. He realized that the degree to which the MERRIER approach worked largely depended on the teacher's speaking skills and reported that he would continue to use it.

In conclusion, Gen's teaching practice was rooted in the traditional grammar-translation method, *yakudoku*. However, he had expanded his teaching repertoire and generated his own methodology of oral introductions. Throughout the process, his wife, his colleagues, the ALTs, and the professors who introduced new teaching approaches all played important roles.

Gen's Stated Beliefs and CLT Practices

In the first interview, I asked Gen about the goal of teaching English and he answered, "One of the goals of English education is, umm, one of them is to make students connected to the world through using English…. And also, I want my students to be, umm, independent through learning English" (2/15/2006). Regarding communication using English, Gen said that it was stimulating for foreign language learners to interact with people who spoke the language. He believed that his students might feel the same way even though they could not yet converse in English. When I asked him if this idea was influenced by MEXT's innovations, he firmly said no but he admitted that his motivation to teach oral English was increased by the presence of the ALTs.

Gen believes that the degree to which students enjoy communicating in English largely depends on their motivation. He said that this view was confirmed while reading Dörnyei (2001). As mentioned above, many agricultural high school

students select those schools because no academic schools accepted them. By this stage in their academic careers, they might already have become unmotivated to study. Gen complained that it was difficult to use communicative activities such as pair or group work, even in oral communication classes. Eventually, he did not use them in English I class and he even skipped CLT tasks in the textbook. He confessed, "I didn't use the tasks. I had enough time, but unless I provided effective CLT tasks, the classroom would degenerate into chaos. My ability to control the students would matter" (2/16/2007). In the difficult teaching conditions that often exist in Japanese agricultural high schools, teachers tend to think of themselves as being incapable of using communicative activities effectively. Gen said, "In a teacher-fronted class, I feel more comfortable [sic]. My students and I feel more comfortable" (2/24/2007).

However, Gen was not satisfied with this situation. As he commented: "To tell the truth, I am hoping to use more student-centered activities and to have them speak more English, but it is really hard to develop their ability to this extent. I think I need more skills. Skills in teaching, yes, methodologies and techniques, too" (2/24/2007). Gen clearly wanted to learn more teaching skills, and when he implemented a new pedagogy, he considered his ability and his students' motivation and proficiency.

Discussion

Interview and observation data indicate that Gen belongs to multiple professional CoPs (represented by solid lines in Figure 1 below): [7] a community of Japanese teachers of English (JTE), English teaching colleagues, other colleagues in his school, and teachers' associations. However, Gen does not appear to have an identity as a member of "Western TESOL" (Holliday, 2005). Many Japanese university professors, language school teachers, and teachers with master's degrees in TESOL *do* belong to Western TESOL. They have meetings and conferences and publish journals in Japan; however, Japanese secondary school teachers rarely attend these conferences or read these journals (Nishino, 2009b). Moreover, high school teachers with a TESOL background often face difficulty using CLT in their classrooms because of students' low English proficiency and examination pressures (e.g., Casanave, 2008). Thus, any overlap between Japanese teachers' communities and the Western TESOL community is probably very small.

Michi and Professor Watanabe belong to the overlapping area because both were educated in a TESOL program and participated in the activities of Japanese teachers' associations. Professor Kunihiro is well known for his expertise in English education. He does not have a TESOL background so he is separated from Western TESOL. Moreover, although ALTs in the JET Program do not specialize in TESOL, their teaching style is student-centered, according to Gen. For this reason, I place them outside of but close to Western TESOL.

In the discussion below, I explain how Gen created context-appropriate methodology (the first research question) and how multi-membership in these CoPs influenced his learning (the second research question).

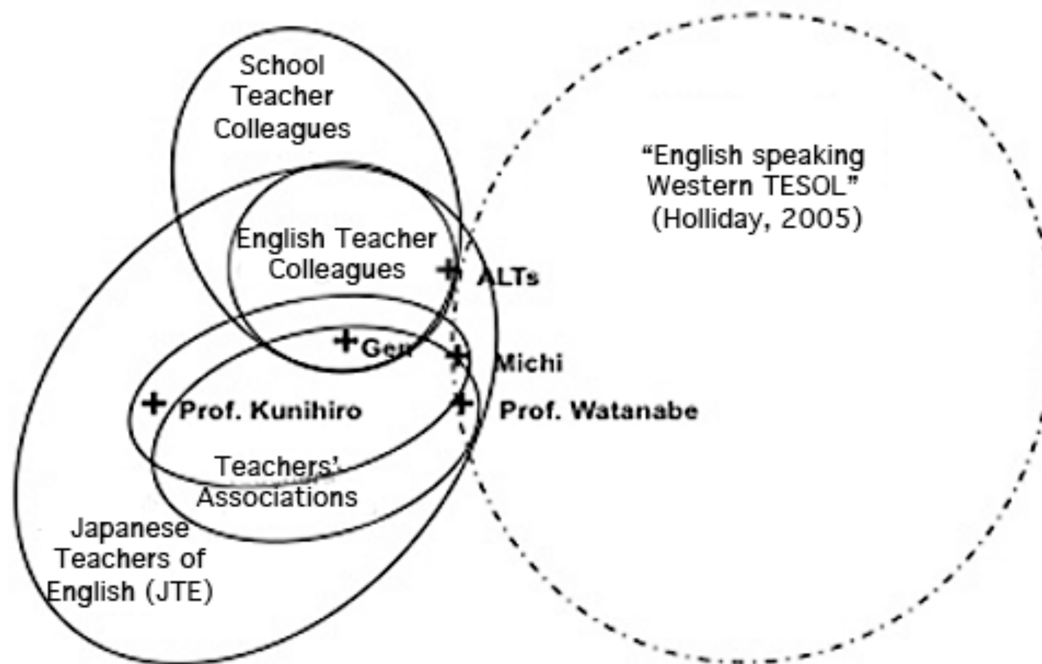

Figure 1. Multi-membership in Communities of Practice

Gen's Learning and Multi-membership in Communities of Practice

First, Gen belonged to the community of Japanese teachers of English. Except for the oral introduction, activities used in his lessons (such as grammar and vocabulary exercises, translation, and choral reading) are similar to those used in *yakudoku*, which has long dominated Japanese English instruction (Imura, 2003). *Yakudoku* is rooted in the method used for learning classical Chinese texts and was employed by translators in the 19th century. *Yakudoku* is thus reified practice in the JTE community and was initially ingrained in the community members' minds and bodies through the six years of English instruction in Japanese secondary schools. Gen himself realized this and said that his teaching methods were influenced by his experiences as a student in secondary school.

Second, Gen was a member of his school's community of colleagues (hereafter the "school community"), whose members may be engaged not only in improving students' academic achievement but also in assisting student club activities and guiding students' daily and future life (e.g., Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999). If Gen had worked in a general high school, he would have had to prepare students for university entrance examinations, which is another important enterprise of the school community. Therefore, Gen once prioritized supervising club activities over teaching English. He also believed that important goals of English instruction included being connected to the world by communicating in English

and becoming increasingly independent through learning. The same tendency was found in Nishino (2009a) and Fukunaga (2009). In both studies, participating teachers believed that they should not only teach the subject matter but also support the student's overall personal growth, which may be unique to Japanese high school teachers of English.

Third, Gen valued the mutually stimulating relationship among the members of a community of English teaching colleagues (hereafter "colleagues' community"). Gen might have learned on paper that teachers should motivate and encourage students; however, he might only have realized it when he actually saw his colleague approaching her students or the ALTs interacting with their students. Gen's interaction with students in the classroom as he gave students individualized feedback might partly reflect his learning from the ALTs. On the other hand, Gen also influenced his colleagues by allowing them to observe his class, talking to them about their classes, and sharing class handouts and materials. Thus participation (observation and conversation) and reification (handouts and materials) combined to enhance the negotiation of meanings, and as a result, promoted the teachers' learning in the colleagues' community.

It should be noted here that Gen regarded ALTs as members of his colleagues' community as *kyoin* (teacher). As mentioned above, Japanese teachers had difficulty team-teaching and communicating with ALTs at the beginning of the JET Program, so the ALTs tended to be treated as human tape recorders (Nishino, 2009b). Wenger (1998) indicates that "useful wisdom often remains invisible even to those who hold its potential, because it can easily become marginalized within established regimes of competence" (p. 216). In Japanese classrooms where the traditional practice of *yakudoku* was used, ALTs could work only as language models and their potential wisdom as communicators, facilitators, cultural reference points, and material providers were probably invisible for both Japanese teachers and the ALTs themselves. In other words, most ALTs, unable to access *yakudoku*, were marginalized from the colleagues' community and eventually from the school community itself. Thus, little mutual learning took place between Japanese teachers and the ALTs.

In contrast, Gen wanted to learn from ALTs and he wanted ALTs to learn from him. ALTs who worked with Gen were not full members of his colleagues' community, but Gen legitimized their participation and prepared the team-taught classes with them. In the process of their mutual engagement, a negotiation of meaning most likely occurred between *yakudoku* (Gen) and student-centered pedagogy (ALTs). ALTs' "legitimate peripheral participation" and the inherent negotiability might have allowed Gen and ALTs to learn from each other (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Fourth, Gen belonged to teachers' associations, which held workshops and seminars. One of them, the New English Teachers' Association, enabled him to encounter Professor Kunihiro, whose pedagogy, *shikan roodoku* (focused oral reading), originated in the traditional grammar-translation method, but which Kunihiro viewed as aural-oral practice that enhances language learning

(Kunihiro, 2000). Gen experienced reading aloud in secondary school lessons, which might have led him to use it at the initial stage. When learning Korean, he realized that reading aloud helped connect spoken text to written text. Finally, when he attended Professor Kunihiro's seminar, it was confirmed that reading aloud is crucial for foreign language learning. As a result, the meaning of the activity was negotiated and altered throughout the process of Gen's professional development.

On the other hand, the Global Teachers' Association introduced the MERRIER Approach, which Professor Watanabe proposed based on the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The approach facilitated communication among teacher and students, but as Input Theory was flexibly applied to the Japanese EFL context (Watanabe, 2003), the MERRIER Approach was different from the Natural Approach developed in Western TESOL. In other words, the meaning of the theory was negotiated while it was being applied in practice. Moreover, when Gen used the approach, he also modified it so that it could be used with his own students. During this process also, the meaning of the theory was negotiated. These examples (reading aloud and the MERRIER Approach) suggest that negotiation of meaning occurs both intrapersonally and interpersonally in the process of social learning.

Another important person in Gen's life was Michi. Gen said that he learned from Michi by observing her teaching, listening to her words, and engaging in activities with her in the teachers' associations. Similarly, Gen reported that he had learned from colleagues, including the ALTs, by observing them and talking to them. Gen's learning in the CoPs thus sheds light on the distinction between learning and intentional instruction and also suggests that the participation metaphor of learning might better describe teachers' learning processes than the knowledge transmission metaphor. As Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, learning can take place where there is teaching, but that does not mean that intentional instruction itself has caused learning as learners need to participate in the practice and experience of doing, seeing, and talking. [8] This supports Freeman and Johnson's (2004) claim that teachers' professional learning is largely the result of participation in CoPs.

Also to be noted is that Professor Watanabe was a peripheral member of both Western TESOL and the teachers' association. He worked as a broker and connected Gen to Western TESOL. He also brought in the new approach as a boundary object. It may be that his high school teaching experience and his teaching qualifications and skills (recall that Gen called him *leader*) legitimized his membership in the teachers' association and that this allowed him to be a broker who bridged the two CoPs: JTE and Western TESOL.

Like Professor Watanabe, Michi was a member of the Western TESOL community as well as of the teachers' association, and her multi-membership likely enabled her to be a broker between the two communities. Michi helped Gen gain knowledge of TESOL and second language acquisition, and it brought Dörnyei's (2001) book to Gen's attention. The book played the role of a boundary object

through which Gen encountered knowledge constructed in terms of Western TESOL. It should also be noted that the book was written in Japanese. Had it been available in the original English version, Dörnyei's book might not have been accessible to this busy high school teacher. Likewise, the MERRIER Approach could not have worked as a boundary object unless Professor. Watanabe had applied the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) flexibly to the kind of practices that could be used in Japanese EFL classrooms. It appears that even if artifacts from other CoPs are brought in, they may not act as boundary objects unless brokers make them accessible to other members. Only then can artifacts become "affordances" (Gibson, 1979) and function as boundary objects.

In conclusion, Gen belonged to multiple CoPs and learned by "observation and imitation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 105). He improved his speaking and teaching skills with the help of the ALTs, learned how to motivate students from Michi's book and his colleagues, and learned a new teaching approach from Professor Watanabe. These factors may have led him to generate his own oral introduction methodology. During Gen's process of learning, Michi and Professor Watanabe worked as brokers and connected him to Western TESOL. If Michi and Professor Watanabe had been marginalized in the teachers' associations, they might not have been able to influence Gen. Conversely, if Gen had remained confined to the school community or the colleagues' community and had not joined the teachers' associations, he could not have learned from Michi and Professor Watanabe. As Wenger (1998) argues, "Organizations must learn to recognize the value of people whose multi-membership allows them to be brokers across boundaries" (p. 255). I would further argue that organizations must promote the multiple CoPs of their members and allow them to meet brokers and boundary objects.

Turning now to possible applications of this study to the context of educational reform, I would suggest that in order to achieve successful curricular innovation, brokers must exist between a teachers' community and a community that promotes innovative practice. Ideally, instructors in teacher training programs should become at least peripheral members of the teachers' communities. As a first step, teachers and teacher training instructors should share activities at teachers' meetings. Also, expert teachers who have learned in different communities could act as brokers, just as Michi did. In Japanese high school, ALTs, both from English speaking and non-English speaking countries, should be treated as members of teachers' communities so that they too could act as brokers. In addition, school administrators should provide time and opportunities for teachers to share practices in their multiple CoPs because, as the findings of this study indicate, teachers can learn new practices by interacting and working with other members.

Western TESOL vs. JTE Community

This study partly unveiled the distinction between two CoPs, namely, the Western TESOL and the JTE communities. The former aims at developing communicative competence while the latter sets additional educational goals to the development of communicative competence. The former's teaching style is

student-centered, while the latter prefers a teacher-centered format. In Gen's particular teaching context, where students' motivation and English proficiency were low and class management was important, it was difficult to use CLT practice as it is used in Western TESOL. Gen wanted to maintain the meaning making potential of CLT, but negotiation of meaning barely took place. Thus, his feelings about the use of CLT tasks and pair and group work were mixed and in flux. Although Gen reported that the teacher-centered style felt comfortable, he wanted to try student-centered activities and believed that he needed to learn more CLT teaching skills.

Gen's dilemma regarding the two different practices might be similar to that of many Japanese high school teachers. Previous research revealed that high school teachers did not use communicative activities frequently, even though they held positive beliefs about CLT (Nishino, 2009a). This also implies that CLT consists only of information transmitted through instructions to Japanese high school teachers, not of knowledge held by their community. Thus high school teachers agreed with CLT principles as information but would not actually use it as "practical knowledge" (Golombek, 1998). For CLT to become high school teachers' practical knowledge, which is what MEXT may have been striving for, teachers would need to participate in the activity itself and build up a new identity as members of Western TESOL (e.g., Wenger, 1998).

I would argue that this is both impossible and unnecessary because Japanese teachers have their own practice and their own identities in the JTE community. Moreover, as Katayama (2010) reports, there are deeply engrained anti-CLT opinions among Japanese high school teachers. In such a context, there can be little negotiation between Western TESOL and the JTE community. As Wenger (1998) points out, "it is the community that negotiates its enterprise," and "CoPs are more resistant to views of their evolution that are not based on a deep understanding of their practice than to change per se" (p. 290). Therefore, top-down communicative innovation by MEXT is likely to prove unsuccessful.

However, this is not to say that high school teachers should stick to traditional practice in the JET community or that they do not need to learn from other CoPs. Instead, what is needed is teachers' active participation in various CoPs, which would allow them to encounter people from different CoPs. Like Gen, who joined teachers' associations and learned from Michi and Professor Watanabe, teachers may be able to meet brokers in the CoPs and learn new practices, attempt new meaning making, and construct new identities. In addition, it should be noted that interplay among enterprises from different CoPs can be promoted not only through participation that allows encounters with brokers but also through reification that brings in boundary objects.

Wenger (1998) indicates that a broker and a boundary object connect us to CoPs to which we do not belong. Considering the growth of global interconnection and communication, the number of brokers and boundary objects linking local communities should increase to the point where the constellation of CoPs can network and share locally appropriate methodologies to build a global TESOL

project. Within that project, Western TESOL, although it is large and influential, is seen as one of a local CoP, alongside the JTE community or, for example, the Chinese English teachers' community. Like Canagarajah (2002), I believe that "we should envision building networks of multiple centers that develop diversity as a universal project and encourage an actively negotiated epistemological tradition" (p. 257).

Conclusion

This study investigated learning by a Japanese high school teacher operating in multiple CoPs. Based on interviews and observations, the findings support the validity of a participation metaphor for teachers' learning and highlight the importance of multi-membership in CoPs. The study also suggests implications for teacher education, curriculum innovation, and context-appropriate methodology construction.

Future research should use a larger theoretical framework in order to examine how socio-historical factors influence teachers' learning. It should also investigate the impact of power relations on learning within and across CoPs, which has barely been investigated within the CoP framework. I would also suggest that there is a need to delve deeply into the structures and activities of teachers' CoPs and how teachers negotiate meaning through these structures and activities. I hope that such inquiry will help reveal the dynamic nature of social learning.

About the Author

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Notes

[1] ALTs do not necessarily come from English speaking countries.

[2] CLT is seen as an approach that functions as a source of principles and practices rather than as a method. CLT aims to develop learners' communicative competence through their engagement in real communication and meaningful tasks. (See, for example, Richards & Rogers, 2001.)

[3] Neither the Course of Study nor the Action Plan explicitly states that CLT should be used. However, MEXT's guidelines for instructing the Course of Study and teachers' reports (Edwards, Kawauchi, Oda, & Nozaki, 2008) imply that MEXT aims to promote CLT throughout English teaching.

[4] "Methodology" refers to a teaching procedure used by an individual teacher to fit a particular group of learners. Unlike a method, a methodology is not fixed (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

[5] Numbers in parentheses indicate the date when the interview from which this quotation was taken was conducted, here, February 15, 2006. "[ ]" means information added by the researcher for clarification purposes, and "…" refers to a material omitted from direct quotations.

[6] The name of the MERRIER approach came from its seven principles: Mime (Use non-linguistic information such as gestures and realia), Example (Show a concrete example), Redundancy (Express the same message from different angles), Repetition (Repeat important information), Interaction (Interact with students or make students interact with texts), Expansion (Paraphrase students' utterances), and Reward (Provide positive feedback).

[7] CoPs are living organizations, so their boundaries are ambiguous. I use circles here merely to better demonstrate their relationships.

[8] In this context, "talking" includes talking within a practice (e.g., exchange information in order to step up ongoing activities) and talking about a practice (e.g., telling a story about oneself) (see, for example, Lave & Wenger, 1991).

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