A Case Study of a Pre-service Teacher's Professional Development in a Supportive Collaborative Community of Practice

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Abstract

外国語教師の専門性の成長にとって、特に教員養成段階では、メンターはもちろんのこと自分を支援し問題共有できる仲間による共同体の構築が重要である。本稿は大学教職課程において英語教科の免許取得を目指して履修する 1 人の学生のオンラインジャーナル記述による協働的振り返りの共同体への 2 年間の参加を通して教員養成への示唆を得ることを主目的として行った事例研究である。結果として、教育実習などの実践的経験が大きな影響要因であることに加えて、振り返りの共同体への長期的参加が複数の役割や立場の経験を可能にし、そのことがその後の英語教師としての成長にも大きく影響し得るという知見を得ることができた。

1. Introduction

Learning to teach is a lifelong process of professional development for teachers. It begins once they enter an initial teacher education program (ITE hereafter), continuing even after they enter the teaching profession and start teaching in front of students in classroom settings. Learning to teach is also a dialogical process that combines practical experiences and skills with theoretical knowledge bases for teaching, which can deepen our understanding of teaching and provide a more complex theoretical foundation. To bridge the gap that often exists between theory and practice, reflective practice is key (McIntyre, 1993; Schon, 1983; Tsui, 2003), and for teachers to grow as professionals and better their classroom practices, they must continually reflect on their teaching.

The current study attempts to examine the process of student teachers' professional development in ITE in Japan and explore how they become more professional as teachers. It particularly focuses on one English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) student teacher who participated in a collaborative and reflective community of practice of student teachers over a two-year period outside the ITE curriculum. This study also examines the specific roles played by student teachers in a collaborative community and whether these roles have an impact on their professional development upon becoming teachers.

2.　A supportive, collaborative community of practice involving pre-service language teachers

As Johnson and Golombek (2011) advocate, teachers' professional development is socially constructed, contextual, and controversial. It is controversial, especially in ITE, given that a gap between theory and practice often exists, as was mentioned in the introduction section; in many contexts, the need for professional development results from the fact that student teachers are likely to lack practical teaching experiences due to the limited quantity of school-based training. Student teachers are also often deeply influenced by their pre-existing beliefs about teaching and learning. These beliefs are based on personal experiences (Borg, 2005) that include language learning experiences and life experiences, as well as observations of their own teachers in the past, criticized as the "apprenticeship of observation" that merely promotes the implicit process of apprenticeship (Lortie, 1975). Thus, these beliefs are tacit rather than conscious (Richardson, 2003; Borg, 2005), and are difficult to change. Without real development of their essential reflective abilities, pre-service teachers may not be able to develop teacher expertise properly by overcoming the possibly harmful effects of such pre-existing beliefs and views in regard to teaching (Miller & Shifflet, 2016; Mumford & Dikilitas, 2020).

The ultimate purpose of professional development, particularly in early professional development in ITE, is to be able to make an inquiry and obtain a new understanding through the description and interpretation of teaching, defined by Tamai et al. (2020) as the meaning of reflective practice. Under such a definition, one possible solution offered in ITE is to create a supportive community of practice for student teachers. Such a community can provide them with opportunities to assist one another and collaboratively reflect on their expertise development. Providing a collaborative community of practice is meaningful for in-service teachers as well, especially when they find professional development challenging due to a lack of collegiality in their workplaces (Asaoka, 2021). Teachers across different schools can work as "diagonal mentors" (p. 97) for each other, as the relationship between oneself and one's mentor with relevant experience and expertise is neither vertical (e.g., between a teacher and an immediate supervisor) nor horizontal (e.g., among colleagues within their own school). Similarly, in ITE, collaborative reflection is effective in that they can work with near peers (Murphey & Arao, 2001), meaning that they can more easily assist each other in making sense of their learning within each other's zone of proximal development. Asaoka (2019) further states that peers can serve as co-meaning makers: "Whether in writing or directly interacting, …cognitive and emotional support by members of the learning community, especially those who are similar to their cognitive, social and professional levels, can mediate novice teachers to conceptualize their learning and teaching more effectively" (p. 129). The importance of describing and interpreting teachers' thoughts and experiences in a community

of practice is also discussed by Shulman (2004). The transformation of teaching experiences into narratives is an act of "selection and conceptualization" (p. 475); in a collaborative community of practice, teachers are pushed to frame an experience in a particular way and place that experience in more abstract and general terms for others to understand. Doing so also enables them to interpret their narratives and construct new meanings together via writing or direct interaction.

3. Methodology

This study is one part of larger ethnographic research on eight studet teachers recruited from two ITE programs in Japan and their professional development. The current study utilized a case study approach, following one participating student teacher for two years in the school years 2018 and 2019, with a follow-up interview conducted in 2021 after he actually became a teacher. The participant responded to an appeal for volunteer participants for this project, and also gave the author an opportunity to document his life trajectory over three years. The longitudinal nature of the current study allowed for an in-depth look at the early professional development of this student teacher in ITE. The following two research questions are addressed in the current study:

RQ 1: What factors mediate the processes of student teachers' professional development in ITE?

RQ 2: How do the experiences of a collaborative reflective community influence the subsequent professional development of student teachers?

3.1 The research context

In Japan, student teachers typically join an ITE program at the undergraduate level upon matriculation to acquire a secondary-school teaching qualification. They go through four years of coursework to develop a wide range of professional knowledge as well as teaching competencies. They typically enroll in teaching methods courses in teaching EFL in their third year. In the case of becoming public school teachers, they take a teacher recruitment exam in the summer while they are the fourth-year students. Once they pass this exam, they become teachers upon graduation.

Under such a situation, the two-year project was carried out across two universities in the suburbs of Tokyo, starting in spring 2018 and ending in winter 2020. Ten student teachers were recruited from ITE programs in both universities in the first year, and eight were recruited in the second year. Each year, the participants were recruited in April, and Shota (the case in the current study, pseudonym) was one of the three student teachers who remained in the project for two consecutive years.

The project consisted of (1) the school year of 2018: three focus-group interviews, an

online journal for two consecutive semesters, and one individual interview, and（2）the school year of 2019: three focus-group interviews, an online journal for two consecutive semesters, and one individual interview. Additionally, a follow-up interview with Shota was conducted in August 2021 after he entered the teaching profession in a public upper-secondary school in April 2021.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Data from the collaborative online journals and focus-group interviews were gathered over two years. The student teachers were first asked to write online journal entries using Google Docs during the spring and fall semesters in the academic years 2018 and 2019. They wrote journal entries regarding their ITE experiences, including ITE courses, their classroom experiences（both formal and informal contexts for learning）, and professional development in ITE, leaving their comments for each other in return by using the commenting function. There were no particular rules in terms of the topics, frequency, number of posts, or language, although they mostly used Japanese, their native tongue.

The focus-group interviews also took place three times for each year: May, September, and January in the school years 2018 and 2019, where the participants freely discussed the journal content and reflected on their ITE experiences. In addition to the collaborative online journals and focus-group interviews, the participating student teachers were interviewed individually to reflect on the experience or meaning of participating in the project at the end of each school year. As was mentioned in the earlier section, in the case of Shota, he was also interviewed in August 2021 after he actually became a teacher. The main purpose of this follow-up interview was to find out how he perceived his prior participation in the project, as well as his induction experiences into the teaching profession.

The data were transcribed and translated from Japanese to English　by the author. The data were then holistically analyzed by looking at recurring topics and the connection between Shota's first- and second-year experiences. Data from the follow-up individual interview were also used to supplement the main findings, resulting in a better understanding of the experience in this case.

4.　The case

The case is described below. Information was taken from the online journal entries, focus-group interviews, and final interviews to illustrate his early professional development in his teaching career.

4.1　Shota

Shota was in his early twenties at the onset of the two-year project. He joined the project because two of his friends decided to join when the author explained the purpose

and recruited volunteer participants in her teaching methodology course. Although he had a rather passive attitude toward participating in the project at the time, he in fact became one of the more enthusiastic reflectors in the group, particularly in the second year of the project. Shota wanted to become a public high-school teacher although he was planning to participate in the teaching practicum at a lower-secondary-school level.

Prior to participating in the project, Shota had taught at a cram school, *juku*, for three years, where he taught a variety of students, from first graders of a middle school to first-year students of a high school, both individually and as a group. Interestingly, he mentioned in the first focus-group interview in 2018, that at the beginning of his career as a *juku* teacher, he soon realized that he had hit a wall of not being able to speak confidently in front of students. He had even thought of quitting the initial teacher education course, as well. Three years had passed at that time, and he confessed that he still occasionally thought he was not adequate for the teaching career when he did not think favorably of his instruction at the cram school.

When asked why he was pursuing a teaching career, Shota shared his experience of having role models that he respected as the main reason; his ongoing expertise development in ITE did not allow him at the time to explain how the deeper thinking behind these teachers' behaviors shaped their actual teaching. In his own learning experience, one ideal teacher he met was when he was in the second grade of a middle school. English was the most challenging subject for him in the beginning, but the teacher inspired him to study English harder, not only because the way she taught was effective, but also because what she taught in class was interesting, although he reported that he could not exactly remember how he had learned English from her. Owing to her teaching, English eventually became his favorite subject. According to Shota, another teacher that he met in high school was also inspiring: the teacher was good at teaching grammar with humor and relevant examples. Shota believed that in middle school, students were expected to learn the basics of English, whereas English should be taught "at a deeper level by providing more specialized knowledge" (first focus-group interview, May 19, 2019) in senior high school. In this respect, this individual was an ideal teacher for Shota with such high teaching competence. In addition, his own father was a high school teacher who inspired him to become a teacher as well, given that he grew up watching and learning from his father.

In the first focus-group interview of the first year (May 26, 2018), Shota described an image of his ideal teacher. It was twofold: one who gives enough opportunities for students to speak in English, and one who can explain the language rules logically. In regard to the first point, Shota himself did not have many chances to speak in English as a high school student, and he realized it was enjoyable to speak in the target language only after he entered the university, where he had many more chances to do so. As for the second point, he reported that by teaching the basic structure of the language more logically, students can learn to extend the knowledge by themselves rather than memorizing the grammatical rules and vocabulary without thinking. For Shota, explicit teaching of the rules was valuable.

Unfortunately, he did not pass the teacher recruitment exam. He then became a middle-school teacher on a temporary basis for the 2020 school year upon graduation from his university; however, in the following year, he passed the exam and became a public high-school teacher, as he wished, in April 2021. He was assigned to an all-boys' high school focused on preparing students to get into high-ranking universities. According to Shota, more than half of the students there wanted to major in science courses, although quite a few students were poor at English (in fact, more so than he had expected). In the school year 2021, when the follow-up interview was conducted, he was going through induction, a required one-year training period for beginning teachers of public schools in Japan, although it was conducted mostly online due to the coronavirus pandemic.

5.　Discussion

5.1　RQ 1. What factors mediate the processes of student teachers' professional development in ITE?

Aligning with Borg's conceptualization (2005) of pre-service teachers' professional development, especially in the first year, Shota's journal entries and comments during the focus-group interviews were mostly based on his informal learning experience (such as teaching at the *juku*) and formal learning experience (such as microteaching during his teaching methods course) because of little direct teaching experience. He also seemed to have been affected by his former teachers, as the ideal model he described above indicated. However, what turned out to be more influential was his own teaching experience during the school-based training in the second year of the project, when he was a senior student. In addition, his shifting roles in the collaborative community of practice over the two-year period were another notable factor.

5.1.1　Impact of the teaching practicum

The three-week-long teaching practicum in 2019 had a much greater impact on Shota's professional development in two ways: a perspective change from deductive to inductive teaching, and from a negative view to a more positive one regarding the use of English in teaching English.

First, as was already discussed earlier, in the first focus-group interview (May 26, 2018), Shota expressed a general preference for a teacher-centered, deductive approach: he believed that a teacher should *explain* the language rules explicitly. He also mentioned that his specialized knowledge (meaning his grammatical knowledge acquired at the university) would allow him to teach using this approach. Despite this pre-existing belief he possessed prior to the study, he seemed to eventually recognize the benefits of a student-centered and inductive approach, especially when introducing new grammatical structures. The following excerpt illustrates this point; in the second week of the teaching practicum, he team-taught

with an assistant language teacher （ALT） and introduced questions starting with "How many ~?" He learned then that allowing students to infer the meaning of a new grammatical structure was effective:

> Because there were two teachers, we were able to do a role play, through which the students could induce the meaning and usage of the new grammar more smoothly. （journal entry, June 18, 2019）

During the second focus-group interview, Shota also reported that this successful experience was influential in changing his view about his teaching approach （September 29, 2019）.

During the third week of the teaching practicum, he experienced a critical incident regarding this issue of implicit/explicit teaching, and he submitted an online journal entry about this on June 30, 2019. By this time, his students had become used to his teaching style, so he found it easier to teach them. In the final week, however, he had trouble introducing questions that started with "what" as another grammatical structure. According to Shota, he first showed some pictures of food and asked the students, "What do you like to eat?" Then he showed them some pictures of smartphone application icons and asked, "What do you use?" With the use of these visual aids, he wanted his students to guess the meaning and usage of "what" in a question form. Although the task itself went well and the students reacted very positively, when he asked them what they thought "what" meant, many of them responded that it meant "which" or "why." Shota reflected on this and noticed that the choices of the pictures made the students think it meant "which." He also received some feedback from his supervising teacher, who said that he needed to teach so that students could understand the meaning of a new grammatical structure more naturally from contextual clues; the supervising teacher also told him that he should have given full consideration to those without mobile phones. Based on the feedback, Shota reflected on his teaching again and tried to analyze what happened in the journal. He originally wanted to attract students' attention. For this reason, he used some visual aids that he thought would attract students' attention. However, he realized that the activity was not meaningful unless it could enable all the students to participate in it. In the following class, he used some famous anime characters such as *Doraemon* in silhouette that middle-school students in Japan would be familiar with, and asked the question, "What is this?" To attract the students' attention, he first covered each character with a piece of paper, and then showed each character little by little by moving the paper down. With this teaching technique, Shota thought he was able to involve the whole class, and the classroom atmosphere became very lively. The students were also able to better understand the usage of "what" in this way.

Reflecting back on this critical incident during the second focus-group interview in 2019, Shota stated that teachers should ask questions that are easy enough for students to answer and induce the meaning from contextual clues. Also, he believed that it is essential to tease

out the meaning from students, and not the teacher-led explicit and direct instruction. As a student, unfortunately, Shota himself had never experienced the latter teaching approach before. Therefore, it was a challenge for him to change his approach; nevertheless, his practical teaching experiences enabled him to realize that students should notice the meaning and usage of a new grammatical rule with the help of contextual clues and collaboration among the students.

Another indication of Shota's shifting perspective over the two-year period due to his practical teaching experience was the use of English as a medium of instruction. In the first focus-group interview in 2018, Shota described the ideal model of a teacher as one who provides ample opportunities for students to speak in English. However, at that point, he expressed a rather negative view about the teaching-English-in-English approach, also called TETE. For example, in one of the few early journal entries he made (June 3, 2018), Shota reflected on the very first microteaching experience in the teaching methods course and explained that his biggest challenge was to teach in English, particularly in terms of responding back to students in English. He explained the main reason for this was that he had never taught English in English during his informal teaching experience at the *juku*. Then, during the first focus-group interview in the first year (May 26, 2018), another fourth-year student teacher who had just experienced her teaching practicum brought up the gap in reality that she experienced: teaching students in English at a middle school where she worked as a volunteer teacher and teaching students in Japanese at a practicum school. Then, Shota responded by saying that the challenge lies in teachers having to explain rules using difficult grammatical terms. Related to the first issue above, at this point, he believed that the teacher was the one who should explain rules explicitly to students, which made him think that it would be challenging to teach English in English.

When the same fourth-year student teacher submitted a journal entry discussing the challenge of TETE due to some high-needs students in class, Shota referred to this during the second focus-group interview (September 29, 2018) and discussed why the use of Japanese in class is necessary as follows:

> When the content of a textbook is difficult, it is also difficult to teach all in English. When students do not understand the content, … but we need to stick to [the textbook] and teach it [in English], it is quite challenging, isn't it? … In fact, maybe the textbook is not developed with the assumption that teachers teach it all in English, right? … When you teach a class that shows a positive reaction [to TETE], you can let students work together and figure out the instructions, but when your class does not show a very positive reaction, you probably need to support them with the use of Japanese.

In the same discussion, the participating student teachers further discussed the issue of English as the medium of instruction, and Shota expressed his thoughts on this, stating that

when he did microteaching (delivering a short lesson to a peer group) in English in the teaching methods class during the spring semester 2018, what he wanted to say did not come out naturally, particularly proper classroom language. Also, he could not respond back to the students' comments or answer properly in English. He mentioned this point again in one of the journal entries in fall 2018. Furthermore, during the third focus-group interview, he stated that he wanted to upgrade his English language competencies, which would improve his teaching skills as a consequence; otherwise, "those with a strong command of English will make light of us" (Shota, third focus-group interview, January 31, 2019). His response indicates that in fact his own lack of proper language skills in English resulted in a rather negative view toward TETE in the first year of the project.

On the contrary, in the second year, Shota reported that he taught English in English during the teaching practicum (second focus-group interview, September 29, 2019):

> I taught in English for about 80 percent of the class time. Basically, in regard to instructions for games and activities, I used English and also tried to use gestures and vocabulary words which the students could understand, which was a challenge for me of course. The number of vocabulary words I could use was quite limited, and within that range, I needed to introduce new grammar structures in English. When introducing new elements of the language, teachers need to connect them to what is already known, and it is really difficult.

In comparison to his view toward the use of English as the medium of instruction during the first year, when his insecure feelings about his own English language proficiency led him to make rather negative assumptions about TETE, here, Shota was able to analyze and verbalize why it is challenging to teach in English, owing to his actual teaching experiences. Furthermore, when he reflected on the image of the ideal teacher he had mentioned during the very first focus-group interview (May 26, 2018), one who can explain the language rules logically, he expressed an alternative opinion (third focus-group interview, January 24, 2020). He stated that a high-school teacher from whom he had learned English had a master's degree in linguistics and taught reading by dissecting sentence structures and identifying whether words were subjects or verbs using his solid professional language understanding. Reflecting on how the teacher taught, however, Shota's practical teaching experiences allowed him to see that the teacher was genuinely unprepared to teach in English, despite the fact that he had the requisite knowledge to explicitly explain the language.

During the final individual interview at the end of the two-year project, Shota described the impact of the teaching practicum and emphasized the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the students (January 24, 2020):

> I changed my opinion totally after experiencing the teaching practice, which had a strong

impact on me. During the practicum, I found out how things really are in a classroom, I mean, I really got to know what it means to be a teacher, and I changed my perspectives about teaching. Before the practicum, I was thinking only about how I teach, but the practicum experience allowed me to notice that good teaching is in fact built on a relationship of mutual trust with students. I made efforts to get to know them by talking to them during recess and over lunch, then they started to speak up more in class and also helped me when things didn't go well in my teaching.

Shota clearly explained in his discussions that the teacher can learn from the students. Although he first believed that the teacher needs to convert grammatical knowledge for students, which could be a stumbling block for TETE, his practical teaching experiences allowed him to change his views. He stated that if the teacher speaks English naturally, the students determine the meaning by themselves.

5.1.2 Participation in the community of practice – social learning and Shota's role shifts

In addition to the impact of his teaching practicum experience, Shota also recognized the influence of participating in the community of practice for student teachers on his professional development. In other words, sharing his ideas and thoughts with peers, particularly with those who had already finished their school-based training, was influential on his early professional development. In Shota's final journal entry of the first year (January 20, 2019) and in the final interview (January 31, 2019), he commented that he was able to obtain valuable information and practical advice from the other teachers, which inspired him to go beyond what he was doing at the time. In fact, the number of his journal entries in the first year increased from two in the spring to seven in the fall, and the exchange of comments between Shota and one of the fourth-year students became particularly active.

Reflecting on the experience of participating in the community in the first year, Shota elaborated on his changed positions between the first and second years in one of the journal entries in the second year (July 24, 2019). In the first year of the project, the fourth-year student teachers told him about their practical teaching experiences and discussed them with Shota. In contrast, not only did Shota talk about what he did during his teaching practicum for the third-year student teachers, but he also had a chance to reflect on his thoughts and feelings about teaching a year earlier. According to Shota, the community of practice provided him with a place to clear his thoughts. By verbalizing his experiences, Shota was able to share them with others for collaborative reflection.

As was mentioned earlier, in fact, Shota became one of the more enthusiastic reflectors in the second year into the project. In addition to the four entries he made reflecting on his own experiences during the teaching practicum in spring, he made a number of comments on the other participants' entries, 22 in the spring and 19 in the fall. For example, when the third-year students wrote an entry describing their microteaching experiences in the methods

courses, Shota often empathized with or encouraged them first, and then gave them specific advice from a "near peer" perspective (Murphey & Arao, 2001). The following excerpt illustrates this; first, one of the third-year students wrote about his microteaching experiences in the teaching methods course and discussed the challenges he faced in incorporating interaction. Then, Shota first asked a clarifying question by using the commenting function of Google Docs, and the student teacher responded with more details. Then Shota gave praise as well as specific advice for him:

Journal entry, December 17, 2019 Student Teacher B:
I did a communicative task for my final microteaching this semester. ... What was the most challenging for me was how to increase interaction among students....When I observed others' microteaching, they made students work on various tasks, but the interaction among them was in fact Japanese. ... I personally think that making middle-school students interact in English is difficult because of their proficiency in English. ... I understand the importance of interaction, but am not very clear how to incorporate it in teaching.

Comment, December 20, 2019, Shota:
Well done! What did you do exactly to incorporate interaction in your microteaching?

Comment, December 21, 2019, Student teacher B:
Thank you. I did a quiz game where the students had to use relative pronouns. One group was supposed to tell an answer to another group, not directly but by using hints such as shapes and purposes of the answer. I thought it would make them interact in English, but as the rules were a little complicated, my classmates who played the role of middle-school students got confused.

Comment, December 26, 2019, Shota:
I think your idea of using a game for teaching relative pronouns is very good. The purpose of using a relative pronoun is to add extra information, so I think it is a very reasonable and practical activity.
As you said, if the rules are too complicated, it is difficult for students to work on a language activity. Here is my suggestion. If you allow students to use only "which is ～ " and ask them to fill in the "～" part in English, the rules are easier, which will make it easier for students to work on the task, although it'll be less flexible in terms of adding extra explanation and information.

In the final interview (January 24, 2020), Shota evidenced a degree of awareness of his own learning via his social interactions with the other student teachers, especially as a peer who had more practical teaching experience:

I think when making a comment, expressing empathy first is good rather than providing advice only in a one-sided manner. It's easier to accept it if you go, " I think your way is good, but how about this way?" ...I was clearly aware of the role of giving advice as a fourth-year student teacher who went through the teaching practicum. ... but of course, I learned a lot from the third-year student teachers, too. I value the community as a place for realizing and reflecting on my growth as a teacher. Expressing my thoughts to the other student teachers many times allowed me to make a new finding and grow as a teacher, and also by listening to the ideas and thoughts of the third-year students, I was able to reflect on my own teaching and reconfirm what could be a challenge for novice teachers.

Shota also emphasized that voluntary participation in the community was key:

As I participated in the community of practice voluntarily, I was able to put a lot of effort into it, and there were things I could not write otherwise. It was totally different from being forced to work with others and reflect on development. It seems that voluntary participation has a significant implication for me.

Indeed, student teachers in ITE may be forced to reflect on their professional development if it is a required element of the coursework. Because they do it to earn credit and grades, the reflection level may remain at the surface level unless there is proper scaffolding (Tummons, 2011). On the other hand, voluntary participation in the project enabled Shota to become more autonomous and responsible as a reflector.

The community consisted of student teachers with different perspectives and roles, and Shota participated in the project for two consecutive years. The examples above indicate that his two years of participation enabled him to experience both roles: a mentee listening to mentors' practical experiences and their advice, as well as a mentor, or a "near peer" (Murphey & Arao, 2001) who listens to and empathizes with the mentee's thoughts, feelings, and challenges, and who provides advice based on practical experiences.

5.2　RQ 2. How do the experiences of a collaborative reflective community influence the subsequent professional development of student teachers?

It should be noted that teachers are expected to continue working on their professional development, even after they enter the teaching profession. Thus, it is meaningful to trace Shota's professional development during the induction and examine how his experiences of participating in a collaborative community of practice with peers has influenced his subsequent professional development after becoming a teacher. With this objective in mind, a follow-up interview with Shota was conducted online in August 2021. Although the impact seems minor, as more than one year had passed since the end of the project, his reported

beliefs as a novice English teacher indicated that he is more inquiry-oriented than before, influenced to some extent by participating in the community of practice for two consecutive years.

As a first-year novice teacher, Shota had to go through induction training in the 2021 school year. In Japan, induction training is required for all beginning teachers of public schools in Japan. According to MEXT, the induction training for first-year novice teachers is required by law: (1) at-school training with a mentor teacher, for more than 10 hours a week, for a total of more than 300 hours over a year, and (2) out-of-school training for more than 25 days a year, usually once a month. In regard to at-school training, a mentor teacher observes a novice teacher and gives advice, or the novice teacher has a chance to observe the mentor teacher. On the other hand, during the out-of-school training, all the first-year novice teachers in the same prefecture gather and discuss the lesson plans that they prepared in advance, or they learn about the latest teaching methods and techniques from lecturers, such as the use of ICT tools in language teaching. In Shota's case, his mentor teacher was in his mid 30s, and they got along very well. He found that his mentor's teaching provided a good model as a useful reference. On the other hand, Shota found that the out-of-school training was less satisfactory, as it was held all online due to the coronavirus pandemic, and he did not have any chances to meet his cohort teachers in person.

One of the issues that Shota recursively discussed during the two-year project in his online journals and the focus-group interviews as a student teacher was the TETE approach (see Section 5.1.1). In the first year, his insecure feelings about his own English language proficiency led him to make negative assumptions about this approach, while he became able to discuss why it is challenging to teach English in English at the secondary-school level in Japan due to his practical teaching experiences. During the follow-up interview in 2021, Shota pointed out that the TETE approach is still one of the major challenges in his teaching that he has been dealing with. He stated that for the first few weeks after he became a teacher, he was completely willing to teach everything in English without fully realizing the actual classroom situation; however, he eventually noticed that there were a few students with poor English skills. As a consequence, although he still tries to employ activities in which students must interact in English in pairs, they are limited to less cognitively demanding tasks, such as greetings and exchanging small talk. He further stated that he now depends more on Japanese to assist students, and finds it more difficult to employ more cognitively demanding tasks, such as making students discuss textbook content and state their opinions about it in English. Influenced by the pedagogical knowledge he had acquired in the ITE courses, as well as the discussions he had with his peers in the community of practice, however, he stated that he believes that the use of oral introduction in English is effective, one of the teaching strategies that depends on the concepts of the communicative approach (Maeda, 2010) and introduces the new content of each lesson in English. Also, he mentioned that he is aware that his use of English is useful when he needs a change of pace in his teaching; when he switches

to English from Japanese, his students are likely to look up and pay attention to him.

In terms of his beliefs about using English in his teaching, Shota has noticed a gap between his pedagogical knowledge in regard to the TETE approach and the reality of a classroom with some students who cannot keep up with others due to this approach. At the same time, however, due to Shota's actual teaching experiences, his explanation above indicates that he is more aware of the merits and demerits of using English as the medium of instruction, and when it is more useful to switch to English from Japanese in his teaching. Shota voluntarily developed narratives for the collaborative community of practice for two consecutive years, and in a way, he had to select his experiences to talk about (Shulman, 2004; Yoshida & Kambara, 2013). The choices Shota made and the chances he had to tell and retell his experiences enabled him to analyze his own teaching practice (i.e., use of the TETE approach) consciously. Clearly, verbalizing and co-interpreting his teaching with his peers during the project helped him make an inquiry about the TETE approach and construct new meanings regarding his approach as an English teacher.

On a different note, in the first focus-group interview in the first year (May 26, 2018), when asked about the image of a good teacher, Shota described a teacher who could provide many chances for students to speak in English as an ideal model. The follow-up interview revealed that he still held the same view, but actually carrying it out in his teaching was one of the challenges he was facing at that time. According to Shota, although the current school curriculum emphasizes the development of speaking skills, he cannot focus on it as much as he wishes. He believes the problem lies in the assessment system in which term examinations are likely to assess students' reading skills and grammar knowledge, but not communicative abilities. He finds this situation frustrating:

> If we had a speaking test, I could encourage my students to use English more, but currently they are only interested in getting good scores on regular tests, and as a result, I need to use Japanese for explanation of grammatical points. This is what I find very frustrating now. (follow-up interview)

Shota further stated that this leads to another challenge that he is facing: not being able to apply what he learned in the induction training to his actual classroom teaching, as well as the lack of a place to share his thoughts and experiences and get alternative perspectives from his peers. He revealed his feelings on this issue as follows:

> I participate in the induction training, and that's it. Actually, what I really want to do most now is to share challenges and problems with other first-year novice teachers. If the induction training was conducted in person, we could at least have an informal chat with other teachers after the training, but we cannot at present. As we did in the journal (of the two-year project), I would love to discuss issues in our teaching with others more

> freely. I want such a chance now desperately. ... By speaking with various teachers, I can often look at one issue from another perspective. I would like to have such a space for collaborative reflection now.

This excerpt above indicates that Shota seems to value the place of inquiry and reflection that he had with other student teachers in ITE during the project, where they shared their experiences and alternative perspectives freely and collectively reconstructed the meaning of their experiences in the process of early professional development. As a novice teacher, Shota needs peers and near peers who can work as co-meaning makers (Asaoka, 2019) and conceptualize their learning and teaching together in a more reflective, supportive, and collaborative learning environment.

6. Conclusion

This article reports the results of a case study involving one student teacher learning to teach English who experienced participation in a collaborative reflective community of practice with peer student teachers. As suggested by Lortie (1975) and subsequent researchers, he held pre-existing beliefs influenced by his former schooling experiences at the onset of the project. Over the duration of four semesters, he experienced both roles as a peer (third-year student teacher) and as a near peer (fourth-year student teacher). He also experienced the process of selecting a teaching incident to talk about and discuss its meaning with others. Owing to this experience, he became a more reflective and responsible participant and was more able to understand and analyze his own teaching . In the follow-up interview, he even analyzed the thinking of the ideal-model teachers behind their behaviors that he mentioned in the early stage of the project. He stated that those teachers were good because they taught him by carefully analyzing their students' needs and interests. The case of Shota in the current study suggests that it is beneficial for pre-service teachers in ITE without enough teaching opportunities to have a more collaborative and reflective learning environment for a lengthy period where they can share their narratives and experience various roles in the learning community.

A further area worthy of research would be what happens to novice teachers who experience such a learning environment when they move into the workplace upon graduation from an ITE program. Many studies report that a number of novice teachers leave the profession in the first few years (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Scherff, 2008). Thus, further research is needed to identify the challenges surrounding novice teachers as well as identifying sources of support, including peers and near peers, who can assist them in initial teacher education and induction.

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