



Division, Department
Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning
581 83 Linköping
SWEDEN

Date
18 June, 2018

Language

Swedish
X English

Report category

Licentiate dissertation
Degree project
Bachelor thesis
X Master thesis
Other report

ISBN

ISRN LIU-IBL/IMPALGC-A-18/004-SE

Title of series, numbering **ISSN**

URL

Title

Learning contexts available for Japanese teachers in a top tier public high school: encompassing a demanding work environment with adult education needs.

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Abstract

Japanese high school teachers are extremely busy. They are covering a myriad of duties in exceedingly long shifts when compared to their colleagues from across the world. The tasks that teachers have to undergo on a daily basis could vary greatly every semester and so does their need for interaction with peers, superiors, society, parents and students. This puts them at the forefront of a wide array of ever changing learning contexts while perhaps also compromising their needs for personal and professional development. Nevertheless, the degree of sophistication and variety of learning settings available to teachers, quite often, mirrors their work commitment and obligations.

Teachers are also aware of additional threats hampering their performance and aims for empowering their students with holistic education. The aim of this research is to identify the strategies that teachers use for satisfying their own adult learning interests and professional development while highlighting the biggest impediments to their learning goals. This study pretends to be a snapshot of the current state of affairs of high school English teachers in Japan as well as a reflection of the resilience of other English teachers across Japan.

I have used a qualitative approach using theme analysis in the interpretation of semi-structured interviews.

Keywords

Learning, Japan, Adult education, High school, Japanese English teachers.

Learning contexts available for Japanese
teachers in a top tier public high school:
encompassing a demanding work environment
with adult education needs.

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Abstract

Japanese high school teachers are extremely busy. They are covering a myriad of duties in exceedingly long shifts when compared to their colleagues from across the world. The tasks that teachers have to undergo on a daily basis could vary greatly every semester and so does their need for interaction with peers, superiors, society, parents and students. This puts them at the forefront of a wide array of ever changing learning contexts while perhaps also compromising their needs for personal and professional development. Nevertheless, the degree of sophistication and variety of learning settings available to teachers, quite often, mirrors their work commitment and obligations.

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Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to offer my sincere gratefulness to The Kingdom of Sweden and its taxpayers for extending the right of universal education to their fellow European citizens. As a person living in a different continent away from home, I cannot emphasize enough how valuable it is for my personal development and well being to have the opportunity of continuing with my education.

Thank you very much to the Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning at Linköping University for accepting me into this program and endowing me with such an exhilarating intercontinental learning journey. Thank you to the teachers and students in our partner universities: The University of British Columbia (Canada), The University of Western Cape (South Africa) and Monash University (Australia) for contributing to such a unique and unforgettable learning experience. Thank you very much to all my peers, tutors, teachers and supervisors all throughout the program for your inspiration, patience and hard work.

Thank you to my thesis tutor Dr. Karolina Muhrman for your advise, help and guidance. Thank you to Dr, Song Ee Ahn for you patience and guidance. To all of the participants of this research; Ritsuko, Hiro, Nyan, Pioko, Sora, Kochan. Thank you for all your kindness and support for finding some time inside your busy schedules.

And finally, thank you very much to my wife Mina for your unconditional support, and to my daughter Marisa for being exacly the way you are.

Abbreviations

ALT	Assistant language teacher
BOE	Board of Education
JET	Japan exchange and teaching
JTE	Japanese teacher of English
NET	Native English teacher
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
T-NET	Temporary native English teacher

1 INTRODUCTION

Japan has the reputation of having one of the most dedicated workforces in the world. Work tasks and work hours have been traditionally blurred into workers' free time. Davies & Ikeno (2002) address the *bushido* loyalty system as one of the main causes of leading Japanese people into the current unpaid over-working becoming a well spread social custom, which sometimes, has resulted in serious illnesses or even become fatal. As a matter of fact, the Japanese language has a specific word for this type of death from over-working, and it is called, "Karoshi". Although this work dedication is undoubtedly extreme under almost any global labor standard, for the people who have lost their lives this way, working hard was the best expression of gratitude for their company and supervisors. Similarly, in current Japanese society, one of the most extended ways of expressing loyalty to one's workplace is by remaining in the workplace physically; regardless of poor productivity concerns or even at the expense of incurring in higher overhead costs for the organization. March (1992) defines it as not necessarily being productive, or working hard anymore, but as the simple fact of staying physically at your working post. According to this same author, failing of being consistent by giving away some of your free time to your company could seriously harm your reputation and lead you to a path of ostracism.

Curiously, this is still the norm in the Japanese working landscape. Even despite having work settings and schedules that are quite often, a clear reflection of work standards across other industrialized nations around the world, there are still a few radical differences that make the Japanese work ethics unique when compared with the labor standards from other countries.

This is how Bramble (2004) explains this culturally rooted overtime inefficiency:

Everybody stays past official quitting time. One British friend of mine tried an experiment: He stayed until 10:00 pm and didn't do a damn thing all day. When he finally left, everyone congratulated him on his effort. The next day he worked like a dog, but he walked out the door at 5:30 pm. Everyone was wondering how he had the nerve to go home so early as he must not have worked hard. (p. 241)

In addition to this last example, is the case with Japanese high school teachers; their required commitment is very intensive and most of the times is given wholeheartedly. They must spend a lot of time and effort fulfilling their job duties. Not only are they also tacitly expected to put on a lot of unpaid extra hours, just like the rest of the workforce as shown before, teachers have been traditionally perceived as exemplary members of society by their communities; work ethics is just one more example of their leadership. On the other hand, because this traditional and broad social perception as educated role models is recently slowly waning thanks to the democratization of education, teachers are currently working harder than in the past for maintaining social relevance and respect, (Kimura & Iwata, 2007). This means that they are spending most of the day at the workplace as most of their duties require their physical presence and personal management. Therefore, learning contexts available for teachers are bound to become increasingly restricted to their work environments.

There are many reasons why most Japanese people have been abiding blindly to this kind of unpaid overtime. Davies & Ikeno (2002) identify the Japanese people as a society that has been stressing the need for group unity since ancient times. According to Sugiyama (1976) this urge for unity and cohesion has resulted in a current social identity that heavily encourages conformism and collectivism. Bramble (2004) illustrates how it does not matter whether if people work so many hours a day; from 10 hours, all the way to 12, even six days a week.

Despite overtime existing as a concept in Japanese labor standards, such overtime could account for a merely 20 per cent addition in wages per hour. To make matters worse, most of the workers do not get that or even anything at all for their extra effort.

This intrinsic Japanese social custom of sacrifice for the greater good can be easily traced back throughout the Japanese history of labor and their traditional approach of production through cooperation. “Rice growing required intense cooperative work for short periods, such as during planting and harvesting. This kind of labor encouraged the formation of hamlets where people had to cooperate with one another.” (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, p. 96). Therefore, it could be stated that for the average Japanese, the fear of failing to comply with the group standards of loyalty and performance reinforces even more the necessity of belonging and keeping a status within the group. “Guilt is sharpest when a person is afraid that his action may result in betraying the group” (Sugiyama, 1976, p 37). Consequently, individualism is not seen as a positive trait and is best described with the following well known Japanese proverb; “The nail that stands up will be pounded down” (Deru kui wa utareru)” (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, p. 197).

Currently, the inheritance of these work ethics has inevitably developed and become a structural part of the modern Japanese society’s workplace. As mentioned previously, its reason of existence holds striking similarities to former work and social relationships. In modern Japan, unpaid overtime is still most commonly seen as the best way of fitting in smoothly and retaining relevance inside a community of practice. The general idea is that giving away part of your free time is one of the best and most clear ways of showing commitment and respect for your work post, profession, and boss as well as to the rest of your coworkers.

1.1 Japanese high school teachers

Japanese teachers are a notable example of their profession in many parts of the world; not very well remunerated, highly dedicated, professional, educated, responsible and reliable. Furthermore, in the Japanese case, the figure of a teacher goes beyond merely teaching, organizing, managing courses or taking care of a group of students. Many teachers are also home room teachers. This means that they not only have to follow up closely with their students' academic performance and behavior thus making them accountable to their parents; they are also held responsible for the students' misdeeds outside of school as shown by Kimura & Iwata (2007). In other words, if a student incurs or is suspected of having committed any crime or caused any trouble, their home room teacher becomes a very visible and important part in the process of solving any grievances among stakeholders. In addition, Junior and Senior high school teachers have the added burden of overseeing clubs dedicated to all sorts of extra-curricular, intellectual, athletic and personal development activities for students. According to Sato & Kleinsasser (2004) teachers who engage in extracurricular activities, attend to a lot of meetings, and are very busy attending their homeroom duties, appear to be the more highly regarded teachers.

Teachers should also attend seminars and meetings from time to time. They are well acquainted with formal learning structures and many have also experienced adult learning in a wide variety of settings and with a diversity of objectives Reed (2016). Considering that teachers in general should be in constant preparation, being the general accepted idea that they should be updating their knowledge in an ongoing basis, this preparation should also transcend their subject of study by gaining competencies that allow them to have a better understanding of how society works and evolves. Learning many things about a wide variety of contexts makes teachers more

capable and flexible at targeting the students' needs. Some of the most important goals for a teacher are to assist their students acquiring an education as well as empowering them more efficiently for a very fast changing social environment.

Ideally, teachers of all grades and subjects should be excellent providers of intellectual stimulation and inspiration to their students. Possibly, one of the most increasingly valued traits shaping the demand for the teaching professionals of the future is their capacity of learning and interacting with others in interdependent and collaborative environments. Teachers should be very flexible and capable of understanding the world around them as well as being able to anticipate, or at least have a vision for the future of his/her students' place in society. Moreover, teachers are increasingly seen as part of the learning environment across practices everywhere, instead of a mere central intermediary in the process of knowledge transfer as in traditional academic settings

1.2 English education in Japan: interaction with native teachers and increasingly veered towards communication skills

The Japanese educational system is endowed with a system of language education with a tradition of including the collaboration of native speaker teachers. Although Japan might not fare very high in English proficiency among its population; possibly, this cannot be due to a lack of concern from its government or its boards of education. As a matter of fact, the government of Japan had implemented a system in 1987 in which fresh graduates from English native speaking countries, primarily from the U.S, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and Australia could also benefit from the experience of coming to Japan as native English teachers, in a supportive environment while earning industry standard wages for a significant extension of time; usually five years (JET, 2017; Lai, 1999).

The job applications for these fresh graduates from overseas are understood by the Japanese government and educational system in a variety of ways. Besides teaching English and being of great support to English departments across the country, they also act as ambassadors of their home country's culture, fostering international friendship and understanding (Lai 1999). "This Japan Exchange and Teaching program", or most commonly known as the JET program, is undergoing great transformation in some prefectures not only due to budget reasons, but also to new educational approaches as well as human resources concerns.

One clear example of the scale in which this transformation is taking place is in the Osaka prefecture. In the Osaka prefecture, commonly regarded as in the forefront of Japanese prefectures in many fields besides education, the JET program has steadily waned in favor of two new programs; the NET and the T-NET programs. The biggest difference between these two innovative programs and the JET program is that native teachers have become locally assessed and hired (Kimura & Iwata, 2007; Reed, 2016). Before, one of the costliest aspects of the JET program was that teachers were sourced from their country of origin. Moreover, the entire number of candidates used to be fresh graduates in any field of knowledge, and they were not required to have any teaching experience. Under the latest programs devised by the Osaka prefecture board of education, the NET (Native English Teacher) and the T-NET (Temporary Native English Teacher) program, prospective candidates should show an interest in a teaching career while previous language teaching experience in Japan and overseas is greatly valued.

Although the new program contracts are a great reflection of the former job responsibilities that used to define previous JET participants JET (2017), the board of education requires its T-NETs and NETs further interaction with students and teachers. They are expected to intermingle with the students as much as possible to make sense and practice of the English

language. This is because, usually, the students experience with the English language is to have been studying it chiefly in grammatical contexts. Despite an acceptable level of proficiency, vocabulary and having been learning English for a very long time, students need to be able to use and experience the language in real life contexts for improving their communicative competence Reed (2016). Therefore, classes with high level of language interaction, logical thinking and creativity such as debates, speeches, negotiations and presentations are highly encouraged for achieving greater language learning results and confidence among students MEXT (2017)

As for the duties of NETs and T-NETs in their English departments, they are also conceived as native assistants to their Japanese English teachers. They are believed to be of significant help at marking, proofreading texts, checking for pronunciation, natural expressions, making sense of idioms, intricate writing styles, expressions, grammatical problems and making native checks to all sorts of materials. Native teachers have been increasingly seen as a very valuable source of ideas and inspiration for planning class activities and lessons. In summary, NETs and T-NETs have slowly become a strong reference for building up a curriculum that is increasingly relying in communication strategies (Sato & Kleinsasser 2004; Reed 2016) as opposed to the traditional rote memorization of phrases and writing patterns.

1.2.1 Japanese teachers of English and native English teacher interaction

By conception and definition under the contract, at its bare minimum, the ideal relationship between Japanese teachers of English and NET's or T-NET's is devised as a working relationship characterized by full collaboration and cooperation towards common departmental goals, Intersquare (2014). In the same vein, native English teachers are generally perceived by Japanese teachers as a convenient source for retaining and acquiring language

skills. They are useful for practicing and remaining up to date with their English communication skills, clarifying idioms, grammar questions and for satisfying their intercultural curiosity Reed (2016). Therefore, given the extremely busy schedules of Japanese teachers, this interaction with native English teachers in their department could be highlighted as a great opportunity for professional development and informal adult education.

Similarly, this work interaction is also of immense help for native speakers for developing professionally (Lai, 1999). This work posts are a fantastic opportunity for foreigners already living in Japan for finding a place in Japanese society where they can be valued, respected and feel useful while learning the Japanese language and getting used to the often numerous, cultural differences.

Furthermore, if we take this working relationship of Japanese and native English teachers to its best expression, this could result into highly dynamic, productive, responsive and reflective English departments characterized by a great flow of cooperative collaboration and synergies among its members (Reed, 2016). This research wants to show how well teachers value the following learning contexts from the “adult education standpoint”: meetings streamlining problem solutions, collaborative efforts conclusive of immediate learning goals as well as spontaneous interaction and collaboration with native English teachers.

1.3 The school and English department featured in this study

In the case of this learning institution, most of the day to day basis decisions concerning schedules, curriculum implementation and school operations are done departmentally and through interdepartmental interaction. There is one main department per subject of study. There are also three departments concerning student affairs per each grade, one discipline department

that reaches out to the whole student body as well as an external affairs department and the PTA (Parent Teacher Association). On top of these decision-making groups, we have the figures of the Vice-Principal and Principal. It has come to my attention that the Osaka board of education stance toward this way of decision making has been changing recently by shifting more power toward the Principal and Vice-Principal.

The English department where the interviews and this research have been conducted mirrors other departments in public high schools across Japan. Teachers are conveniently seated together arranged in three groups of desks, one per grade. The leader of the department is decided among all the department members being this post occupied by a different person every year. For this matter, the English department has a flat hierarchical structure and the department leader is most often regarded as the department's spokesman. The leader is also responsible for receiving and handling diverse levels of official and personal student and teacher information and for using the right channel of communication among stakeholders.

The English department of this study is characterized by its flexibility and great degree of collaboration among its members. Both genders are well represented as well as a good diversity of age groups. Far from being a disadvantage in communication or collaboration, everybody respects and supports each other fostering a great diversity of points of view and capabilities. Every teacher seems to be very grateful to be able to tap from this collective knowledge usable for professional questions of all sorts. The younger staff members are usually more proficient in innovative technologies applied to education as well as the latest teaching tendencies. In turn, the most experienced teachers are usually the most capable at deciphering grammar problems and extremely valuable to get advice on complicated teaching and behavior dilemmas. Teachers in this English department are accustomed to collaborating with each other in a wide variety of

contexts ranging in intensity; from lessons planning and setting goals for the whole school year, to timely streamlining for solving problems along the way.

1.4 Research review and questions

This study is an exploration of the adult education challenges endured by Japanese high school English teachers working in a very demanding work environment. My aim is to find out what kinds of informal learning structures, settings, synergies and contexts are available at fostering their professional development inside or outside their communities of practice regardless of its professional or personal nature and application. Viewing teachers as engaged “Adult learners” with a constant necessity of learning, what kind of learning strategies and objectives are they pursuing for enriching their lives as well as inspiring others in their environment and practice?

The aim of this research is to find out what teachers are eager to learn regardless of its professional or personal nature or application. Once knowing about their interests, to identify the strategies that teachers use for satisfying their own adult learning necessities while identifying the biggest impediments to their learning goals.

-Are Japanese high school teachers of English motivated adult learners?

-What are the learning contexts available for these teachers and how are they taking advantage of them fostering their own learning?

-What are the major detrimental forces hampering teachers’ development, performance and well-being?

2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1 Values and beliefs shaping learning

Before there is even an interaction, there are a few conditioning factors that can have an interesting influence in interpersonal relationships. People shape their identities through their own narratives, and the way they see themselves has an enormous influence in their decisions and outcomes in life (Watson, 2009). This authors' case depicting the strategies employed by a child to confront and avoid bullying at school and consequently growing into a wise and fair manager, shows how past experiences carry over to the future and have a direct impact shaping a person's character and professional attributes. Nevertheless, the narratives, or the way in which a person perceives and portrays to others should ultimately be negotiated and agreed by the listening party. Narratives help shaping identities and these identities combined help understanding bigger social groups. The narratives of the past become a narrative for the future and future aspirations. Life outside of work greatly shapes life at work and working habits.

In the same line of thought, Li (2012) states that teacher preset beliefs and assumptions about learning have the power of shaping their own learning goals as well as becoming a limiting factor to their own development. Säljö (1979) wanted his participants to describe their learning activities and their general beliefs about what they think learning was all about to them. He also points out about learning for school or for their life as adults and teachers while addressing it as artificial and as organically unrelated to non-scholastic contexts.

An interesting theoretical aspect also deemed to be mentioned, is the control that the interviewees could have in a study just by the power of their own narrative. According to Vincent and Warren (2001) interviewees are not passive; they also have the power to shape the

interview by misunderstanding questions and giving away extra information that could be useful and also by consciously trying to control the interview. Interaction across interviews could be unstable and uneven. Every interview and interaction is different.

2.2 Learning as a cultural experience

Culture finds ways of teaching subjects and ideas in different ways acting as a mediator for learning, understanding and explaining the world. For example: traditional learning is unsuitable for Navajo culture. “Human experiences are inescapably cultural in nature, and learning and growth take place within cultural boundaries” (Säljö, 1991, p. 184). Ten years after this bold statement, Säljö (2009) also defines learning as definitely associated with the complexity of human activity. Human societies, technology and ultimately occupations can be very complex and flexible to changes. Learning is lived and is very difficult to codify with accuracy the breadth and complexities of human experience. “For research on learning, a strategically important move seems to give recognition to this fact, and to carefully examine learning in the context of human practices, and to attend to the what, where, who and when of learning will be important” (Säljö, 2009, p. 206)

Säljö also references Piaget and his theory of learning as a product of the individuals actively cognizing and describes learning as a natural human activity Säljö (1997). When this happens, teachers are automatically immersed into problem solving debates where everybody’s knowledge and perspectives are pooled in, cross-fertilized and are made sense of as a group. Even though, when in some cases, we cannot identify young native speakers as very experienced in life, they are conversely more experienced in natural English pronunciation than the average

Japanese English teacher making them more experienced. This idea mirrors Säljö (1991) idea of using the help from more experienced persons.

2.3 Learning agency and reflection

Teachers are usually eager to learn more about their field of expertise. In addition to the learning experiences from their everyday practice, another crucial aspect of their professional development is how they make sense of their learning experiences and how this is converted into more agency and ownership of their learning goals. Ketelaar et al. (2014) also defines this as a confluence of the learning goals that teachers already had for themselves. That is why, when teachers aim at developing further in their careers they are also in the path for greater self-realization. Nevertheless, the ways in which professionals learn also have an impact in the way and approach in which they conduct their practices.

Conversely, the higher the teacher's agency, the better prepared teachers become at implementing learning structures and successful classroom management strategies. According to Ketelaar et al. (2014) learning agency is intrinsically inspired in awareness and problem solution. Teacher's learning agency and ownership make these professionals more flexible and aware of their own deficiencies as well as more capable of assessing what is most needed for their practice. While the aim of teachers at completion of their professional goals is in clear sight, in a supportive learning environment, this cannot be done without adapting to the students necessities and possibilities.

Kaartinen (2009) highlights the need for professionals who know how to learn, or in other words, are knowledgeable of socio cultural learning approaches. The co-construction of meaning among participants reifies in a will for reflection in teacher practices. When a new

pedagogical approach, teaching technique or technological aide is evaluated and agreed upon the teaching community, teachers are naturally encouraged and bound to test it without questioning its usability before trying. Interpersonal relations are negotiated in the community through interaction. Joint development usually takes place most efficiently and smoothly without competition and in a highly supportive environment.

2.4 Collaborative learning communities

New learning is re-assessed by De Kock et al. (2004) by quoting various authors dating back to John Dewey as socially situated and constructive. Therefore, participation in social activities constitutes learning, especially in modern learning environments where collaborative approaches of learning are highly encouraged and valued.

A fully functional and inclusive teacher department is perfectly aligned with the socio cultural principles described by Lawler (2003) regarding Adult education. Teacher development through collaborative support and social interaction happen fluidly and effectively when all the following principles described by Lawler are achieved;

-Create a climate of respect

-Encourage active participation

-Build on experience

-Employ collaborative inquiry

-Learn from action

-Empower the participants

-Collaborative supportive learning

Heather and & Phil Hodkinson (2004) work echoes Wenger (1998) work in terms of viewing communities of practice as rich learning environments based in social interaction but with the addition of engagement as a variable mirroring the quality of interactions and learning. They view learning as directly influenced by participation rather than by acquisition. In addition to this, these authors also view communities of practice as multilayered, diversely located and with different levels across sectors as well as overlapping in various ways. Their research targeted four school departments located in two separate schools; one school located in a rural environment and the other one in an urban one. The most important part of their findings was to note that the quality of interaction and subsequent learning experiences in the close-knit supportive teacher departments was much better and in opposition to the less supportive and loosely integrated teaching departments. According to them, all teachers learned, but only in the close-knit departments, their learning took an extra dimension. The culture and context of the department is determinant to the breadth of learning among its participants.

Calderón (1999) takes this socio cultural aspect of learning a step further identifying teacher departments as learning communities or TLC's or Teacher Learning Communities. Quoting previous authors such as socio cultural pioneer Vygotsky or August & Hakuta; Calderon reaffirms that some of the most crucial aspects of group learning and productive synergies take place in a social context and as a product of understandings negotiated among the members of a group.

Calderón's (1999) definition of TLC's is also a clear definition of what it could be perceived as a fully effective and capable teacher department; a community of teachers

collaborating towards success in teaching objectives and student learning. Similarly, the English department that I am studying stands in the same way of collaborative support. Teachers are not in a competitive stance among each other, they are in fact, working towards common goals, fostering a fully collaborative and supportive working environment by sharing ideas, information and teaching strategies. When they are set to find a solution to a problem, or the best way around an academic challenge, their immediate, first level source of information and consultation is always their group of peers.

In addition to all of the former approaches, So (2013) makes a transformation to the ubiquitous term of “community of practice” in socio cultural learning theory by highlighting its highly participative nature by naming them “inquiry communities”. According to So (2013), in the world of educational practice, when the inquire community is given enough life span to prosper, these groups can adopt a very dynamic, critical and active stance in the way its members interact and learn from each other, regardless of their positions or careers. This heavy interaction is due to the fact that members see each other primarily as fellow researchers above everything else. It is also crucial that for this intensive exchange of ideas to exist, participants of the learning community should be tolerant of conflict as well as sincere and generous in opinion sharing. This does not mean that conflicts will not arise, but that the group’s culture and identity is going to be shaped by the way in which these conflicts are addressed and solved.

3 THEORY

3.1 Socio cultural learning

This study could easily fall under the theoretical umbrella of socio cultural theory. Socio cultural learning theory advocates for the utter importance of social interaction and cultural conditioning as the tenets for shaping human learning. Some of the most representative theorists of this line of thought such as Säljö and Wenger have come forward with examples of how humans learn under different organizational cultural settings as well as with different levels of integration and power within organizations and cultures. Learning per se, is an intrinsic human process and most often, it takes place in social contexts. We learn and become who we are by emulating behaviors and negotiating the meaning of what surrounds us. Therefore, good and evil can be learned all along a wide range of human life experiences that usually require human interaction. Then, it is up to the individual to portray what it has been learned by giving it a meaning through personal negotiation with the environment.

3.1.2 Learning through engagement

According to Säljö (1997), we learn better when we are actively involved in activities that require our attention, and especially well when these activities are cognitively and motivationally challenging. Learning is an intrinsically human activity and this can happen anywhere: schools, work places, movie theaters, dance floors and so on. Just because “Human beings live in a world that is cultural in nature” (Säljö, 1991, p. 180) our learning is shaped through social interaction. Therefore, we are a product of what we understand from our shared cultural practices. In addition to the former, everybody learns differently in depth and breadth. This is because our social spaces are very diverse since they are naturally made resembling

human individual diversity. In other words, the world is very complex and we are not capable of codifying or representing these complexities only in our accounts. Conversely, what we can do is gather and store knowledge to be learned by future generations. For this matter, human communication, sign making and collective knowledge building can all be named socio-cultural tools for storing information for learning. Nevertheless, learning has to be lived. We may prefer learning from more experienced individuals and through intense interaction. But effective learning usually happens when there is engagement on the learner side.

3.2 Communities of practice

As mentioned above, people learn as social beings, interacting in a multilayered array of situations, locations and social contexts. This is defined by Wenger (1998) in the context of communities of practice. This author sees knowledge as a matter of proficiency among peers and contexts. According to her, learning is situated and it begins to take place in the periphery making its way to the core as the learner becomes more proficient.

The defining learning factors that shape the way in which individuals and collectives approach learning are clearly explained with the graph in the next page provided by Wenger (1998). At a glance, learning is portrayed clearly as multidimensional in depth and breadth, and does not conform to one single variable, much less to any exclusively academically learning style nor supposition.

According to Wenger (1998) these are some of the parameters in which peripheral engagement thus learning outcomes take place.



FIGURE 1 Components of social theory of learning.

Source: Wenger (1998)

-Meaning: This is precisely what learning wants to produce. Our changing ability as individuals and collectively arising from the experience when we are living meaningfully in the world. The capacity of learners to incorporate change through reflection from their practices and the ability of transforming to adapt better to the environment and learning goals. Ideally, teachers also must be learners in progress thus constantly experiencing transformation themselves by learning through experience. They have to transform and adapt to engage their students into more meaningful lessons.

-Practice: Contexts and frameworks that are conducive to interaction, engagement and ongoing learning within a practical approach. The tasks that learners have to undergo on a daily basis within their communities of practice. In a Japanese high school these are some of the most relevant practices for teachers: classroom interaction with students, peer interaction, meetings, finding solutions to academic and behavioral challenges, participating actively in club activities, ceremonies, rehearsals, competitions and event preparations are some the most popular practices

where teachers learn by doing. On top of that, these practices usually vary every semester putting them in a wide array of ever changing learning contexts.

-Community: The communities of practice where learners interact and participate with different levels of engagement, knowledge and power. Social configurations in which skills and participation are valued and recognized as competence. As for high school teachers in Osaka; teachers are first given approval when they are hired by the Board of education according to their qualifications, experience and ability. The immediate community group that validates their rate of belonging is the school department in charge of their field of expertise and ultimately, the rest of the teaching body and school hierarchy.

-Identity: Learning triggering personal transformation and subsequently shaping personal stories and finding a place within a community context. From the new comers to the very experienced, every learner is becoming in one way or another through peripheral participation and active engagement. As learners engagement becomes more valuable they move further into the core of learning and decision making; therefore their identity is also shifting more towards roles with greater responsibility. The opposite applies when learners disengage from learning interaction contexts and roles; their identity as proficient learning players diminishes greatly as they become less relevant.

In addition to the former, it is also possible that learning could take place outside a community of practice; Wenger (1998) identifies this as Marginal learning. However, according to the same author, most often, learning takes place in the periphery of a community of practice, and as the learner engages actively in learning, so does the learner's integration within the community of practice. Club activities are a great example of learning outside the community of

practice for different reasons. First of all, many teachers do not have any past experience with the activity of the club they have to oversee. Most of the times they are not interested in the activity nor they are learning about it by being part of the community of practice. Also, club activities are not part of their main purpose at school. They can be requested to change clubs anytime and their role in these club activities is usually ensuring that its operations are safe and as scheduled.

Reification takes place after learning and it could be compared to the product of such learning or engagement, be it a set of skills, a realization, ability, literary work, a new law, something solid such as a machine, a work of art or civil engineering. As for an English high school department such as the one in this study, this comes as curriculum and lesson approaches, sets of long term and short term objectives, learning goals, grading standards, interpersonal relationships, departmental culture, interdepartmental relations and problem solution procedures.

This study is about Japanese nationals working in an English department of a top tier Japanese public high school. The Epistemological orientation is “Interpretivist” as I have tried to capture as much as possible of the meaning and intention of the participants’ data by rechecking as much as needed with them. I have reviewed the recordings closely while paying attention for implicit cultural meaning susceptible to be lost in the interpretation of data.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Interviews

I have used a qualitative approach characterized by semi-structured interviews. I have asked questions inductively, by gathering first respondents' information regarding their qualifications, experience and simple questions about themselves as well as facts from their daily lives that do not require to be developed in their narratives. I did it this way aiming at getting basic information about the respondents while setting the mood preparing them in advance for questions that need more elaborated responses. Even though English is not the native language of the interviewees, and that they have various levels of proficiency and communication ability, I believe that having restricted these interviews to the English department is far preferable than targeting other departments where I would have needed to rely on the services of a translator, thus adding extra pressure to the interviewees as well as complicating the subsequent process of analyzing and presenting data effectively.

Moreover, regardless of having a clear-cut template format structure for the interviews, I made it to be a rule for myself to be as flexible as possible to adjust to the individual circumstances of each interview while retaining a clear focus in the purpose of the study. Whenever a respondent wanted to give more attention or detail to any of their concerns, they were completely free and encouraged to carry on with their deliberations without any pressure of length or content. As a result of this, there was some variation in the length of interviews ranging from 32 minutes to 45 minutes having an average time of 40 minutes per interview.

I have always been expectant to see if teachers could identify or come up with an idea of the learning environments they want to be part of in a near future regardless of its existence in

Japan or elsewhere. For that matter, the semi-structured interviews have been geared in a way in which there was not much room for too many questions but variance in the intensity, scope and depth of these questions. In this direction, I had not have any trouble asking about something not strictly related to their profession, but related to their society or cultural mores. I think that this tacit way of squeezing as much particularities as possible from their working principles and personal mindsets can make an important impact in the findings.

Interviews were conducted at the school, in a quiet location and without any noticeable background noise. Interviews were recorded in two different platforms; with a portable Mini Disc recording system using a high definition microphone and with a smart phone in mp3 format. Recorded data has been kept properly indexed thus making it easily retrievable and convenient for the subsequent intensive analysis.

4.1.2 Sample

My initial goal was to have at least five interviews which I ended up exceeding by one. Having a final sample of six teachers, I tried to choose wisely among the potential respondents so that the retrieved data could be as useful as possible coming across my subject of study. All the respondents were asked to come up with their own nickname not only to protect their identity, but also to be able to recognize their own contributions while giving them a sense of advocacy and ownership in this study. I believe that doing it this way has several benefits. First, only each one of the teachers will easily see what is portrayed about them. Second, as a researcher, it was not very difficult for me to interiorize their nicknames since they are very typical and natural sounding Japanese pseudonyms.

Coincidentally, all six nicknames have different initials making their differentiation while plotting concise tables even clearer. This has proven to be very helpful while analyzing the data; it became very easy to spot who said what every time I had to re-check a table in the process of highlighting the relevant themes to be used in the study. It made it very easy to keep a mental image of the interviewee. Had I ever had any problem with any incomplete thought or while cross checking the data, I could recheck it back quickly with the raw data from each interview.

4.1.3 Data analysis

In the analysis process of the data rendered from the interviews, my intention was not to pay excessive attention to linguistics, tone and the nuances of the English language as commonly articulated by native speakers. In other words, the interpretation of the interviews is intended to be as “factist” as possible as a means for building up interpretative consistency as well. In addition to that, I have tried to pay attention to some of the Japanese that could have been unconsciously slipped during the interviewee’s delivery, especially if it becomes relevant and conclusive at elucidating more sophisticated ideas.

I have employed a thematic analysis by coding the raw data from the interviews into empirical clusters. My main reference to engage in this thematic analysis is Boyatzis (1998). Just like the author in this theory book of data analysis, I started by identifying and understanding the three main variables from which this study is drawn. The first one is the “Units of analysis” or the people involved in this study, in this case the six teachers that I have interviewed. The second one the “Units of coding” or interviews, the very six interviews I have conducted, recorded and transcribed. And finally, the “Phenomenon of interest” which are all the different and most

relevant themes and subjects that have aroused from the raw data and I have outlined and plotted into a grid.

The first step at analyzing the raw data was to make a transcription of all the recorded interviews. Then, I listened to the audio closely for several times and re-read them many more times while jotting down ideas and paraphrasing what I thought it was the most relevant information. After taking a short pause for a couple of weeks, I went over the interviews again, this time writing down as much summarized information as possible while making an outline of each interview. The next step was to make a preliminary grid with all the possible themes as they were popping up while analyzing the raw data from the interviews. Then, I checked for which teacher paid attention or mention each theme by entering only their initials. This table was very easy to understand and trace. As already mentioned before, using their initials has allowed me to move faster while keeping a mental image of the respondents.

I have tried to keep the information as close as to the raw data as possible. My main goal was to stick to the raw information to analyze the phenomenon, not twisting it into what I wanted it to be. I had labeled themes as they have become apparent; whether I had expected them or not. Even though, my interviewees are also my coworkers, for me is hard to imagine their real struggles since due to my contract responsibility, I am present at the workplace for an average of seven hours a day, as a part-time worker and with very limited responsibilities. Therefore, I did not have to be very careful about falling into “projection”, defined by Boyatzis (1998) as getting into suppositions out of knowing my interviewees struggles too well or mirroring the desired outcome of the study.

The first step to identify, distinguish and give strength to the themes drawn from the interviews was to create a code. I followed closely Boyatzis (1998) model for creating a good code by paying attention to the following parts as explained by this author.

-A label identifying the theme, what it concerns or its characteristics.

-A description of how to know when the theme occurred.

-A description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the theme.

-Examples of both positive and negative to eliminate possible confusion when looking for the theme.

I used this code for filtering the previous table in which I had highlighted the most recurrent and strong themes to exclude anything that could be deemed redundant and for reaching ultimate clarity in the later exposition of findings and arguments.

In addition to previous research procedures, I also kept analytical notes in a journal and analyzed them in an ongoing basis while paying attention to the state of the research. I also used this journal to jot down any thoughts or ideas that could be valuable for implementing changes if a more reflexive approach was needed. I began analyzing and interpreting the interviews from the first few interviews knowing that this could work very well in between interviews since I already knew that they are going to be conducted at various times stretching into many weeks in between. Far from this being a disadvantage, I believe that this sketchy time frame in between interviews helped me very well at elaborating more reflexive, tuned up and revised interviews for the following rounds.

4.2 Ethical considerations

I made consent forms mirroring the ones suggested by Denscombe (2007) with my name clearly written on it and the institution to which the research was going to be presented, Linköping University. I explained that this research was examining the professional development of Japanese teachers of English working in a highly demanding work environment. In the explanation I included the title of the thesis: *Learning contexts available for Japanese English teachers in a top tier public high school: encompassing a demanding work environment with adult education needs.*

Teachers were asked for their participation in a personal interview where I would ask about their perceptions and experiences working as a teacher. They were informed that the interviews would be conducted at school in a quiet location and that they will be audio recorded. I gave them a time estimate of 35 to 45 minutes per interview. I made a table where teachers could specify the most convenient times and/or possible appointment time and day for conducting their personal interviews. I also explained that all data would be stored in a password protected computer. I also let them know that in addition to the Master's thesis, it was possible that the material gathered in this research could be included or published in journal articles and conference proceedings.

They were also informed that I was going to keep all the information and data strictly confidential. I also asked them to pick their own pseudonyms with the aim of preserving the participants' privacy while promising them not to leave out any clues about their work location. I made sure that if they decided to participate in this research, they still had the right to withdraw their contributions, including the content of the interview or the discussion, at any time until one

month subsequent to the interviews. Also, they were told that I could be inquired anytime if they wished to withdraw or they had any other questions in regards to my research. Finally, I had a section at the end of the document with my signature as a researcher (Swedish Research Council, 2015) showing commitment upholding the standards that I am promising to honor.

4.3 Respondent contributions and method reflection

Teacher narratives in the interviews appeared to be very sincere and in tune with their real passions, concerns and demands. According to Vincent and Warren (2001), every interview and interaction is different and interaction across interviews could be unstable and uneven. Interviewees are not passive; they also have the power to shape the interview by misunderstanding questions, giving away extra information that could also be useful or they can even try to consciously control the interview. As for the interviews that I have conducted in the course of this study, I have to say that I did not have any major disruptions. Despite interviewees making the usual uneven contributions, in time and depth, I was very fortunate to receive proper answers and reactions to every question.

I would like to emphasize that the contributions and views made by the teachers of this study were given in utmost sincerity and clarity. I made sure that my participants were comfortable to say whatever it came to their minds and however they wanted to express it. All of the participants were excited to participate in this study and appeared relaxed and engaged during the interviews. One fact that contributed to this relaxed atmosphere is that I have been working for the same department for a number of years. Most of the teachers already know me quite well and trust me.

I was also very careful not to get into easy snowball criticism targeting their working conditions or focusing on negative aspects of their contributions by not participating or giving my opinion during their contributions. That is not to say that I don't agree or sympathize with their cause. All the opposite, my main motivation to have chosen to study their working conditions and self-development is because I really empathize with their struggles. I always kept the focus on them answering the interview questions freely, comfortably and as unbiased as possible. Consequently, the interviews came out naturally and without giving the impression that they were prepared, rehearsed, influenced or curved in any way

5 FINDINGS

The following section is an analysis of the themes extracted from the teachers' responses during the interviews.

5.1 Participants and themes

I have interviewed 6 Japanese nationals who are teachers working for the same English department in a high tier Japanese public high school. The English department of this study is a good example of diversity. Teachers in this department come from very different academic backgrounds, age groups and also have very different professional experience and proficiency. Both genders are also well represented. 4 of the interviewees are full time teachers, one is a part time teacher and the other one has part time teaching duties.

TABLE 1 Information about teachers

	Gender	Teaching experience	Experience in the current post
Ritsuko	Female	30 years	5 years full time teacher
Hiro	Male	6 years	6 years full time teacher
Nyan	Female	30 years	6 years part time teacher
Pioko	Female	33 years	3 years full time teacher
Sora	Female	20 years	7 years full time teacher
Kochan	Male	20 years	10 years part time teacher and in charge of external relations

Below are the most recurring and relevant themes that have arisen after analyzing the data:

-Interests and hopes

-Training and learning

-Work practice

-Long hours and effort

5.2 Interests and hopes

This theme analyzes teachers' interests and their hopes for their professional and personal future. It is presented divided into interests and hopes.

5.2.1 Interests

Ritsuko is a good example of a teacher having interests and hobbies clearly aligned with her career. Her favorite hobbies are closely related to her job; reading English literature in English and watching foreign movies.

Ritsuko: I like reading books, listening to music and sometimes watching movies.

She has a genuine interest in the English language at many different levels.

Human drama, I like *Orland*, it's originally from a book written by Virginia Woolf, and it's about an aristocrat in Queen Elisabeth's era.

I want to learn, yeah how to write English sentences, English essay more properly and I want to be able to talk more about the culture or politics.

She sees English as a great tool for expressing herself and understanding cultures, politics and other issues that require a deeper and more global approach.

Hiro finds comfort in downsizing his belongings and his hobbies are also aligned with his career; he is an avid learner and a world traveler.

Hiro: Travelling, net surfing, reading books, sometimes taking photos. And this days... ah, cleaning. Not cleaning itself so decrease the amount of belongings, because I have a lot of books so I sold a lot of books or some books that I will not read again.

Besides her hobbies, Nyan is well aware about the latest trends in education outside the English department being well acquainted with teaching methods that are currently popular among Japanese learners.

Nyan: Flower arrangement, ceramics; Japanese and Chinese. I am interested in “cliru” teaching other subjects in English. Do you know the Sofia University in Japan? Gochi daigaku? Some teacher there try to spread how to teach as a “curier” way. I could teach Economics, History or Geography.

Pioko has many hobbies and interests. She has achieved a myriad of skills along the years. Pioko has learned English and Korean and remains very interested in learning more languages. Nevertheless, her learning interests are beyond languages and foreign cultures.

Pioko: Well, when I was young I enjoyed skiing and scuba diving or traveling abroad. But now, no more, I have no time for doing that kind of things. This days, my hobbies are only really reading, listening to music and watching videos.

I will continue to learn something; like Spanish or Korean language. I want to read more English books because I have no time. I want to listen to music more.

Classical guitar music is so relaxing. I love it. Maybe some time I can learn how to play the guitar. Spanish guitar like the gipsy Kings, it's so cool.

She has had also exposure and had learned about how to do Indonesian handcrafts. She has been dying clothing with wax in the traditional Indonesian way and has had a great time using this skill with her students.

I'm interested in cloth dying and I have tried doing so in Indonesia and about ten years ago or so. Battik, using wax for resistance.

Sora is interested in reading and travelling. She is eager to learn sign language for helping hearing impaired people as well as to become of assistance for the vision impaired.

Sora: Traveling and reading books.

I want to learn sign language. I want to talk to hearing and vision impaired people. I want to help them and to have communication with them so I want to learn these tools.

Kochan has the lifestyle of a learner. His natural curiosity is a trigger for a myriad of daily learning contexts. He likes to learn new things and takes upon challenges such learning new computer systems and using new phone applications.

Kochan: Walking around and discovering new places. I like new things; now I'm trying to manage a computer, a Mac.

I really want to have interaction with students. I want to continue to keep teaching English.

I created the Sorinji kempo club, so for me it's a hobby. I try to get there as much as I can, when I don't have a lot of work to do.

Kochan is also a well-seasoned and experienced Shorinji kempo practitioner who enjoys meaningful interactions with people from all walks of life and ages.

Teachers learning motivation is very high, they display great eagerness to keep developing as English teachers and educators having a great desire for personal development and learning about many different things.

5.2.2 Hopes

Ritsuko hopes to continue making English interesting to her students by enjoying English herself first.

Ritsuko: I just to want enjoy myself teaching. To enjoy myself teaching I need to study more about many kinds of things. I really hope the students will like English so for that goal maybe I need to like English and enjoy English myself and study English myself. I really need to continue enjoying English.

Hiro hopes to become a better teacher as he gains experience and to eventually be of help teaching in a developing country.

Hiro: I want to be a better teacher in teaching English or in teaching foreign languages
I want to use this experience to Benin or other developing countries teaching English,

Nyan wants to get back to graduate school someday and thinks that continuity is important. She wants to continue teaching in the future.

Nyan: I hope to start again at the graduate school,

Continuity and never give up to keep going. Sometimes the goal is in a different way but the aim is the same.

Pioko wishes to make full use of all of the new technical teaching materials at school. When she retires, she wants to enjoy many hobbies.

Pioko: I want to make the most out of the equipment we have in our classrooms. I want to make some improvements in my teaching using this new equipment; projectors and e-blackboard.

I want to live a life of hobbies after retirement

Most of the teacher hobbies are in clear consonance with their job duties and everybody wants to use their knowledge about different life aspects to make an impact in their practices. They have to be constantly adapting and learning new teaching approaches as well as developing their own English skills to pace up with the students' ability and necessities.

5.3 Training and learning

This theme is aiming at analyzing teachers' present and past learning contexts and dynamics. It is divided into five parts: Learning style, training, cooperation, adult learning experience and benefits of learning.

5.3.1 Learning style

Ritsuko values interaction with NETS and native speakers as an important learning context.

Ritsuko: have a conversation with a native speaker like you, talk about your interests, it depends on the person who you are talking with.

Hiro has develop many different approaches to his own learning and relies in many different learning platforms and technical help for his foreign language development.

Hiro: Repeat and practice and to experience. For me repeating is very important because even I learned a lot during my student time, I forget.

First one is audio, CD, Radio anything is OK so audio machine is necessary because I like overlapping or shadowing when I practice foreign languages so audio machines always help me. Sometimes movies are helpful.

He is knowledgeable and has agency of his own learning as he weighs down the conveniences and inconveniences of using different learning methods.

It depends on the case, because, if I choose formal learning, of course, I myself I have to visit the specific particular space. So, it's good to manage my schedule. If I choose informal studying, sometimes, maybe many times, I will skip it.

Hiro is actively learning contexts during any of his spare time, including his commute. He does so by implying a variety of methods and using a highly dynamic planning and scheduling.

For lessons, I try to make time to prepare for the lessons at school, so I will be searching for important words at the desk, unknown words, and sometimes when I commute, I will read English newspapers, or I will check the English news through the smartphone

Nyan is well aware about the latest trends in education outside the English department being well acquainted with methods and teachers that are presently popular among Japanese learners. She is keeping herself adaptive and receptive of new educational approaches and theory.

Nyan: Nowadays, the oral method is very popular, so the grammar translation is not so popular, but I think both are important for learning foreign languages. We want many chances to speak in English. Interaction, context related...

I like to study by myself; Learning or reading many books or listening to the radio or researching on the internet and watching interesting news programs. Al Jazeera TV program and is very interesting, I installed NHK TV programs and is really interesting.

Formal way is sometimes boring but the informal way is exciting so...Both are important, a balance.

Nyan likes to learn by herself but she is open to new ideas and learning contexts by accepting ideas from other teachers. She also values greatly collaborating with other teachers as a learning

I like to communicate or interact with each other, but I study alone. I try to observe other teachers class. I try to observe other teachers skills.

This year, my aim is to use English in many ways. For example, I am now an interviewee, researching papers and so, at my class, I try to use English only even in the grammar class.

Currently, one of her preferred learning contexts is learning through videos.

Now, I get lectures from a professional JUKU teacher their tempo is very quick. I try to get English grammar for the high level students

Pioko prefers to learn informally and at her own pace

Pioko: I'd prefer individual learning. I prefer informal learning

As an English teacher, Sora has a good sense for gauging her English needs and customizing her learning experience with a variety of methods and learning preferences.

Sora: I can learn English by myself, but if I have that chance to go to a school I think is better. If I have applied for the school I have to pay for it so it makes me want to go.

At first, Kochan wants to decipher the meaning of what he cannot understand by himself. He only asks for help when he cannot go any further.

Kochan: At first I learned by myself and check it by myself. Then I read books schools and the Internet can ask somebody who might know something about it.

All of the teachers have a high degree of learning agency. They have acquired a lot of experience learning and attaining new skills informally, on their own and using their own learning methodologies.

5.3.2 Training

Ritsuko is knowledgeable of training schemes provided by the board of education for improving her teaching skills. However, she would be more involved in this kind of training if it weren't for her busy schedule.

Ritsuko: Sometimes the board of education offer incentive courses in the summer like teaching skills, improving your teaching skills, like, supported by the British council. I once participated in that program. It was free during my regular working hours but, basically teachers are so busy so they can't do it, they can't participate. Sometimes they offer some kind of training but usually it is held in a weekday afternoon, but mostly we can't participate.

Hiro is knowledgeable of the available teacher training programs and has participated in some of them with satisfactory results.

Hiro: Some publishing company has some workshop or lecture like.... Last time I attended one held by Benesse and it was open to all English teachers, I didn't pay anything and they gave me some books, CDs. I liked it and I think I learned a lot. Another company is called zettukai it was a special lecture for English teachers in Japan.

Nyan is knowledgeable of training schemes aimed at developing her teaching skills but her condition as a part time teacher doesn't allow her to take full advantage of it. She remembers that a few years ago was easier to get into more training seminars and events.

Nyan: I pay by myself. I get many information because I belong to the English department. So it is easy to get a lot of information but Osaka prefecture does not give me money support. But 10 years ago the situation was different,

Pioko is well aware of other learning opportunities being offered by publishing companies and the board of education but she says that usually she cannot participate in them because of her lack of free time.

Pioko: So many kinds of seminars are prepared for us teachers but now I don't have any time.

Textbook companies and publishing companies sometimes organize seminars to help us make the most out of our materials. I have tried to do that kind of seminar once or twice and they are so good.

Sora is aware that she cannot take advantage of all the learning opportunities being offered by the board of education because she is too busy to participate.

Sora: For example, new teachers must go; it is there their duty to go to these seminars. We have a lot of information about these seminars but it is really hard to take part in them because we don't have any time.

Kochan has mixed feelings about the seminars and training schemes available for his development. He doesn't appreciate when they are too formally structured as they can be boring. On the other hand, he also recognizes that when these training events are held by private companies in competition with each other, they can come up with interesting approaches and learning dynamics.

Kochan: the seminars offered by the board of the education can be too formal so it's a little bit boring for me. It's changing but not so practical for me, it's kind of based in the old style of learning. Sometimes seminars by publishing companies can be very good because they're kind of a struggling to stay longer so they study hard and come up with better ideas.

Every teacher interviewed in this study is knowledgeable about current official teacher development programs and they have participated in many different adult learning schemes over

the years. At the beginning of their careers they are required to participate in teacher training seminars.

5.3.3 Cooperation

Cooperation is an important part of the daily operations for Ritsuko. She is used to sharing many tasks and information with her department coworkers.

Ritsuko: We all have to cooperate with each other. We always share our work: problem solutions, making handouts mass copying or...sharing tasks.

Hiro values other teachers and NETs help and collaboration as a great learning context valid for a variety of applications; from lesson planning and designing to implementation and problem solving.

Hiro: many teachers help me: For example arranging classes, or preparing new systems, or lesson planning, or preparing events for the students like bunkasai festival (Culture day) sports day, so in that field many teachers help me. The NETS also help me a lot. I can always ask for help and it's very normal. Native speakers always help me when I need ideas for lessons, some extra activities or grammar issues.

Nyan also values greatly collaborating with other teachers as a learning context citing the diversity of knowledge and specialization of the teachers in her English department.

Nyan: You know our staff is very diligent, they study hard and they have very big knowledge. Anytime I ask them, I can get a lot of information, more than what I expect. Many of our teachers have different majors from English so I can get to know about a lot of information.

Pioko is also giving great value to interactions with her fellow English teachers in her department and refers to her school as a great place for learning because of its high level.

Pioko: Discussing with my co-workers is very important because they are so smart. I always feel like I need to learn more, especially English. This is the highest level high school in my career.

Sora gives value to interactions with the rest of the teachers in her department. She recognizes watching other teacher lessons and receiving feedback from other students as a great learning context as well as asking questions to the NET in her English department.

Sora: I can always ask my coworkers about anything and I am satisfied with the answers because they come from different points of view. It's enriching because sometimes they recommend me some books or materials.

We try to watch each other's lessons and give feedback to each other. You are a big help for us. If we have any question, we can ask you anytime and you can give us nice advice.

Kochan values any kind of social interaction as a valuable learning context; interaction with other teachers in his English department, NETs, students as well as other kinds of people from outside school. He includes everyone for different reasons and appreciates age diversity and experience as great motivational forces for learning something new every day.

Kochan: When I have interaction with people it's a kind of learning. I'm always learning from younger teachers and older teachers. It's very good to interact with foreign speakers such as yourself because you have experience about things I don't know.

There are several aspects of a learning community that promotes fluid communication and synergies resulting in better interaction quality and learning results.

In the case of a Japanese high school such interaction takes a different dimension at many different levels given the many teacher duties and responsibilities. In this English department learning through interaction and collaborative approaches happens frequently arising from

practice and work related challenges. These challenges have a variety of pace and intensity in collaboration making these teams more cohesive and supportive each time.

One way this is happening is when Japanese teachers of English benefit from interacting with the native teachers of English or NETs. This is a very highly contextualized learning environment formed by teachers of all walks of life and interests, but of only one nationality, interacting with assistant teachers from different national backgrounds and cultures towards achieving the same learning goals and objectives.

5.3.4 Adult Learning experience

Ritsuko has experienced formal adult learning with mixed results.

Ritsuko: I once, went to an English school, after work five or six people in each class. The group was good, sometimes it was very interesting, it was very inspiring, but it sometimes gets boring, the teacher had to pay much more attention to slow learners.

Hiro has experience achieving good results learning by himself.

Hiro: I had learned Korean for two years. Doing copying doing practice listening I was able to polish my language skills

Nyan has experience learning formally for her adult education needs.

Nyan: After that I got a certification for teaching English as an envelope study system, I tried to get a Master's degree for TESOL.

Pioko has experience achieving good results learning by herself giving importance to the pace and joy of learning.

Pioko: Actually, A few years ago I was interested in Korean language because I wanted to travel to Korea. I learned Korean by myself.

First I recorded radio Korean lessons and I had listened to it so many times during my commute. I bought some good books... The pace was so slow but I enjoyed the learning process itself. After learning about it, I went to the country to practice the language and improve it. I went there just for two weeks of by myself.

Sora has experienced learning on her own with the help of literature tailored to her level and learning objectives. As an English teacher, she has a good sense for gauging her English needs and customizing her learning experience with a variety of methods and learning preferences. One of her main reasons for learning English in these varied approaches is that she can use what she is learning in her practice and with a clear benefit to her students.

Sora: I am subscribed to the mainichi newspaper which it's easily written. I like to read English novels although some of them have explanations and links in Japanese to follow the story better. They are made for learners and I can also recommend them to the students.

Kochan has experienced learning in a variety of contexts and with a diversity of professional and personal objectives in the horizon.

Kochan: from learning IT, I can bring my iPhone to the classroom and I can connect it to the projector. Then I can use the drop box so I don't have to use a computer or a flash memory. Is really s but simple for me, it makes my life more convenient. Linkedin and facebook are very good resources for me to get ideas. Also books, movies, music and so on.

Every Thursday night, I also join a Sorinji kempo club next to my house. Every Thursday night I learn something from my master he is 84 years old and I really respect him. Every little bit I learn helps me.

All of the teachers have had experiences developing themselves as adult learners with a variety of objectives and results.

5.3.5 Benefits of learning

Ritsuko: So knowledge or new ways of thinking makes you more inspired and curious about life itself. To know something enables you to enjoy your life more.

She envisions learning as a source of inspiration and strength; to her, learning is fundamental for understanding and enjoying life to the fullest.

Hiro: Studying is protecting myself, protecting from bad people, having knowledge about life, in order to not be sick, in order to not be poor and make the right decisions... This is not related to professional learning but related about my life.

When it comes to learning, he sees the benefits of education without a doubt; it is important for him to learn new and different things in a wide array of settings. Hiro gives high value to learning as a great safeguard in life. He sees learning as a way to know better the world around you, making sound economic choices and avoiding hardship.

Pioko: If we stop learning, we are just animals. To be a human being we have to keep learning and improve ourselves. We need to constantly change and challenge ourselves.

To her, learning is what make us human and she sees it is a necessary challenge for improving ourselves.

Sora: If I learned for instance, something about English, I feel better more relaxed.

Sora finds peace knowing about a subject that is related to her work knowing that it can become useful in the future

Kochan: Learning is a good nutrition for my soul and mind. If my mind and soul are good that affects my body in a good way.

For him, learning is transcendental in life and it has a clear influence to a person's mental and physical health.

Every teacher sees a clear benefit from learning and recognizes a number of positive impacts that learning has to their personal lives, practice and well-being.

5.4 Work practice

This theme aims at exploring teachers' current and past practices as well as their views on students and clubs. It is divided into four parts: teaching, work experience, students and clubs.

5.4.1 Teaching

Every teacher believes that any time spent in their own education and hobbies is not only valuable for their personal development but also for developing their professional ability. They are fully aware of their own learning having a clear impact in their lessons and teaching practice.

Ritsuko: When I'm class and it happens to be about topics I know very well I can introduce them to some other related things to the students and they feel more inspired.

She is fully aware that having a bigger exposure to English literature and foreign cinema would have a clear impact in her lessons and teaching practice.

Pioko: Any hobbies or any interests are useful for teaching. In Japanese it is said that we should have as much knowledge and skill wealth as we can because it is useful in teaching. The more hobbies we have the more wealth we have. And this is definitely useful for our profession.

To Pioko, having many hobbies is a measure of wealth, and she loves to put this wealth to a great use with her students.

Nyan: I like teaching because the school is a special place. The same generation gathers and interact with each other. I like watching their changes and growth.

Nyan enjoys seen every cohort of students developing and growing while being part of this process.

I make efforts to be a good professional teacher because my students want to be taught in a better way. I try to adapt to them or their needs.

Not only knowledge, but teaching the mind is very important.

She is striving to be a great teacher learning any method that delivers results. She is a teacher with a clear focus and set of objectives while keeping a great degree of flexibility and self-awareness.

Sora: If I learn more English it affects my lessons by making them better. If I read a novel, even if it is not related to English or English learning. It will enriching me and this will have a positive impact in my students.

She believes that learning as much English as possible, and from as many sources and subjects as possible, is of a great help to her students.

Hiro: If I read books attend events, lectures or have special curriculums they will help me teaching and probably, I can help students to learn more or in different way. Experience is the most important but many students like tricks.

This is a great source of inspiration for his practice and highly beneficial for his career.

As a teacher, I have to show the important things in life. Not only the subject, but also in life so, I think learning about life helps me to teach students to live well, to wise up and values.

Kochan: When I learn a new method, I try to use it as fast as possible. When I make sure it works well I try to incorporate it into my practice.

He is seeing a clear benefit from new tools and apps for his practice and professional development.

Most of the teachers have a holistic approach to their own practices and they want to teach their students beyond the mere academic goals. Their hobbies are in clear consonance with their job duties and everybody want to use their knowledge about different life aspects to make an impact in their practices. For them it becomes very self-assuring and pleasurable to share their knowledge with their students when they are particularly knowledgeable about a theme or subject related to their teaching objectives.

5.4.2 Work experience

Ritsuko refers her work experience as an advantage being more confident in her practice

Ritsuko: As I grow older, I feel like I am getting better at teaching because of experience and maybe patience and maybe a little knowledge as well. I feel more comfortable than before.

Pioko reflects back in her work experience to identify what she thinks is the best job position for her.

Pioko: this is my 33rd year, and this is my seventh school. I like to see many kinds of schools just out of curiosity. I wanted to experience as many different kinds of schools as I could, so I started teaching at the junior high school level.

Now looking back, I prefer a middle level high school.

Some of the most experienced teachers in these department see their own work experience as a strength for their profession. This is giving them an extra insight at recognizing what their ideal working setting would be like.

5.4.3 Students

According to Ritsuko, generally speaking, students are taking a turn for the worse; they are less motivated and they have more problems than before.

Ritsuko: this days students are very childish and they have a lot of problems. I feel the students this days are more troublesome and childish and we have to care more about other aspects. They are less motivated, and they have some problem in their basic lifestyle.

Also they have become more dependent on teachers. They are portrayed as lacking patience, endurance, curiosity and engagement.

Students are so used to being supported by cram schools. They don't know how to study by themselves. They lack of vocabulary, even in Japanese, even in their native language, they don't know a lot of words because they are so used to texting.

They don't understand the question itself because of their lack of vocabulary in Japanese. So sometimes I have to teach what it really means in Japanese first and then switching to English.

According to her, students are increasingly approaching their own education with a result driven mindset, aiming at high scores in the fastest way possible, narrow-mindedly and with short term goals and aspirations.

They only care about getting high scores efficiently, this is how cram schools teach them. Their way of thinking is so superficial. They just seek for the shortest and fastest way to get high scores.

They are required a high level of thinking your own opinion, critical thinking and the students have to be patient about it but most of them easily give up.

Hiro perceives his students as lacking enough learning motivation, engagement and not putting enough work for being accepted into the prestigious universities they are aiming for. It appears that many of his students want to achieve their goals with the minimum amount of work possible.

Hiro: Students are really passive. Many of them avoid hard working and many of them avoid choosing what they like but they want to go to a high level university like Osaka City University Osaka, Kobe or Kyoto University. Some are without a clear dream or a clear aim. Some are OK to be an engineer to be a teacher.

Pioko thinks that teachers have less respect from students than before.

Pioko: Yes, they don't think much of school teachers like old days. Sometimes I think that we are students' servants. It seems like students regard teachers just like shopkeepers at a convenience store. It looks like we're just doing a service job. Before, teachers were more respected than now.

Sora agrees that there is a possibility of students becoming more childish than before but does not have any particular concern regarding her current students. She did however have experienced much worse situations in her previous high school.

Sora: it is not very hard because students tend to cooperate. In my previous high school, a low level high school it was very hard to teach. Many teachers are saying that students are becoming more childish.

Kochan also agrees with students becoming less mature and self-dependent.

Kochan: I think that the students at this high school were more mature and behaved differently. Students are more childish

As some teachers have pointed out in the interviews, students' motivation has been shifting heavily over the years towards achieving higher grades and not necessarily better education. They are increasingly motivated to attain human success chiefly under the capitalistic terms of money and power. Students are steadily losing interest in holistic education to such an extent that they are not even paying attention to their vocation or natural aptitudes.

5.4.4 Clubs

Ritsuko does not think about the club activity with joy or satisfaction. She identifies only commitment while highlighting the amount of time she spends in it.

Ritsuko: Saturday and Sundays we have to come to school, so often, and we have to take the students to some tournament or competition, yeah, all year round. Yeah, I'm in charge of the soft tennis club and they train every day, and after school they practice and we have to stay until the club activity ends.

Even in the summer vacation teachers have to attend club activities

Pioko is excited to be in charge of the classical music guitar.

Pioko: Learning something new it's a very exciting for and from this April I have been in charge of the classical guitar club.

Sora identifies the difficulty of spending so much time complying with the level of commitment needed for overseeing and caring for the club activity successfully.

Sora: I am in charge of the dance club and the arts club every teacher has to be in charge of two clubs. Sometimes I have to come here on the weekend for 4 to 5 hours because the students can't do club activities if a teacher is not present.

Many times, these club activities are not aligned with the teachers' interests and motivations having teachers that they could go as far as disliking their own club activity. On top of that, the economic compensation is merely symbolic and is usually not worth the trouble.

Clubs can be big trouble for teachers sometimes especially if you don't like them. These extra club hours are also paid very little.

Kochan is satisfied overseeing his club duties. He considers himself fortunate to be the founder of his own club activity.

Kochan: I created the Sorinji kempo club, so for me it's a hobby. I try to get there as much as I can. Especially when I don't have a lot of work to do.

Teacher's opinions about clubs are very diverse. Only the teachers who have a real interest in the club they are overseeing are satisfied. Nevertheless, encompassing these adult education and personal interests is quite hard and only those who are lucky enough to integrate their interests into their work duties and schedules are fully satisfied. Of all of the teachers being interviewed, only one has been capable to do so.

5.5 Long hours and effort

This theme is an exploration of teacher's overtime and effort and it is divided in long hours, not paid overtime and effort.

5.5.1 Long hours

Ritsuko, Sora and Kochan clearly mention how many hours they work every day.

Ritsuko: 10 hours a day

Sora: 10 to 11 hours a day

Kochan: From 7:35 and back home at around 7pm.

Hiro is especially bothered by working so many hours.

Hiro: 10 hours a day.

Probably this is one typical problem of Japanese school teachers and society. If we leave the workplace at 5pm and go back home or to another school, we teachers and other people we will be able to learn a lot of things

He identifies excessive overtime as a Japanese cultural problem and its negative outcomes affecting the way in which people learn and live their lives.

Overtime work stops this chance (this from happening) unfortunately. Yeah, I wish this problem will be disappearing within 5 or 10 years. For me it is OK to cut 15% or 20% of my salary but I want to go back at 5pm.

To him, excessive overtime is unproductive and unnecessary. He does not want to work extra hours and he is willing to earn less money in exchange for more time for his personal development and well-being.

Nyan: In this high school I stay longer than at other high schools. I am not sure, but depends on the day; one or two hours

Despite her status as a part time worker, she is also working overtime.

Pioko is also tired of working extra hours. She is looking forward to retire. She is working too many overtime hours and this is having a clear impact in her lifestyle.

Pioko: In average I work from 8 to 8, sometimes even until 9:00 PM. I need more time, probably I can do this after retirement

She needs to have more time for resting properly and getting refreshed.

All we have is time to go back home, have supper, rest a little bit and that's it.

Overtime is neither well paid nor wanted. Teachers clearly identify extra hours as the biggest impediment for fulfilling their personal life goals as well as for attaining a balance between life and work. This excessive amount of extra working hours is having a clear impact in the way these teachers view themselves performing their duties as well as how these teachers learn, rest and refresh themselves for the next day or in between tasks. Teachers are complaining about not having enough time to do anything they want as well as lacking proper rest. For most, working hours are so long that they are left with very little time for their own personal and private use, including the much-needed time allocation for enjoying proper meals and sleeping hours.

5.5.2 Not paid overtime

None of the teachers is getting paid anything for their daily overtime.

Ritsuko: 2 hours every day mostly all year round

Hiro: I work almost 2 hours of unpaid overtime every day.

Nyan: I don't know but 3 or 4 hours a week.

Sora: 2 to 3 hours. Totally unpaid

Pioko: Four extra hours on average every day. Not paid hours

Furthermore, when she is taking the trouble of managing a club activity during the weekend, its remuneration is practically insulting.

And as for the club, I sometimes have to come on the weekends and is paid very little; less than the students' part time job

Kochan makes a separation between the extra hours he spends in his regular work duties and the extra hours he spends in his club activity which is also his hobby. Nevertheless, he is not getting paid anything for any kind overtime.

Kochan: Six unpaid extra hours a week. Sometimes I have to come on the weekends for the club activity which is my hobby, if I add it, it will be 8 or 9 hours a week.

This issue remains unsolved without any clear end in sight. Not being paid enough for their participation and struggles while coping with their excruciatingly long hours is clearly having a great impact in their lives. Every teacher has mentioned something about working too many extra unpaid hours or poorly paid club duty hours. They also agree that when there is an economic remuneration for their extra hours, this is usually not enough, or not worth the trouble and dedication. Overtime, paid or unpaid is never requested by the teachers.

5.5.3 Effort

Ritsuko, Pioko and Sora complain that being too busy is in the way of their efforts to provide students with better lessons and hampering their own learning.

Ritsuko: English teachers and math teachers are quite busy and always preparing for the lessons after doing some other official work, even after the school year. I think all the teachers in this school are feeling very tired. Busy all year round. I just need to feel refreshed once in a while, if I feel very tired I don't want to learn new things.

Pioko: Besides teaching we need more time to learn something new. I always feel... please give us more time to learn and more time to study. In the end this will make students better; go back to the students.

Sora: we are so busy preparing lessons attending club activities and doing other types of work and sometimes I don't have enough time. . I feel very sorry for my students because I could do better lessons but I am just too busy.

This is clearly affecting their wellbeing and teaching careers When teachers are not well rested, they cannot perform well in the classroom and work related duties while their attention and health could easily weaken. They cannot give their best to their students because it is not possible for them to prepare their lessons well and take their teaching capabilities to a higher level. On top of that, they cannot pursue their hobbies, adult learning interests and share its consequential personal growth and personal experiences with their peers and students.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Teachers' reflection and motivation

Teachers, like everybody else, tend to have better learning outcomes when they are actively involved in activities that require their attention, and especially well when these activities are cognitively and motivationally challenging. All of the English teachers in this study show high learning motivation. They want to learn inside and outside of work. While most of them are good group learners, some might be more independent and others do not have any particular preference for learning, everybody is motivated to learn anything that can be applied to their practices and beyond. Apart from their obvious academic standards and qualifications, most of the teachers have had formal and informal learning experiences of all sorts; aiming at their professional and personal development. These teachers are also aware of current funded and private teacher development programs while some of them are motivated to learn more about innovative ways of teaching and learning.

Teachers are eager to learn more about their field of expertise. In this English department they are actively learning from each other in a confluence of the learning goals. The ways in which these professionals learn also have an impact in the way and approach in which they conduct their practices. Their learning agency is intrinsically inspired in awareness and problem solution. This higher learning agency and ownership makes this teachers more flexible and aware of their own deficiencies as well as more capable of assessing what is most needed. Japanese high school teachers of English have become increasingly reflective in their practices and they are usually not settling in a particular educational approach. They are not afraid of testing new

approaches as well as sharing information with peers or inviting fellow teachers and guests to their lectures when needed.

Teachers are increasingly aware that learning has to be fostered with a diversity of methodologies and approaches. They see learning as multilayered in scope and depth and with students learning in different ways. They know that learning in school should be natural and organically related to non-scholastic contexts and through practice. That is why they are currently implementing more practical and contextualized approaches into their practices such as debate, speech, presentations, impromptu conversation and role play. Moreover, teachers are also appreciative of interaction with their peers, superiors, staff and school stakeholders as a learning opportunity.

Fortunately, these reflective teachers are matching the demand for professionals who know how to learn or in other words, are knowledgeable of socio cultural learning approaches. Every cohort of students comes with different levels of strengths and weaknesses. English education in Japan has increasingly taken a more communicative approach while lowering the official age for starting English lessons. This is having an ongoing impact on teachers' lessons and approaches; when these new cohorts of students enter high school, they expect to learn higher and English skills and take their communicative ability to a different level. Teachers have to be constantly adapting and learning new and ever changing teaching approaches as well as developing their own English skills to pace up with the students' necessities.

6.2 Learning contexts available for teachers

Learning is shaped through social interaction thus making us a product of what we understand from our shared cultural practices. Therefore it can be assumed that any high school, as containers of great human interaction, should be great providers of a myriad of educational and cultural experiences. In addition, these learning experiences are not only limited to students. Teachers, parents, staff and stakeholders are also learning from these social contexts of interaction available at school. While teachers and students may participate and interact in clubs and lessons, teachers also have to rely often on their peers, NETs, T-NETs, superiors, parents and stakeholders for achieving their goals and duties. Almost all of the teachers in this study are strong group learners and they value these interactions greatly. They identify interaction with native speakers and their fellow English department teachers as their greatest source of inspiration and for learning new educational approaches. To a lesser degree, they are also aware of the importance of interacting with other departments, superiors, parents, stakeholders and people outside school.

Wenger (1998) sees knowledge as a matter of proficiency among peers interacting and engaging with a diversity of intensity and influence. The English department of this study boasts a great diversity of academic backgrounds and age groups with very different professional experience and proficiency. This makes knowledge to flourish profusely from a wide array of peer interaction contexts. Consequently, as teachers get to know each other better within their community of practice, they become more aware of whom to ask for more educated answers and qualified help. Wenger (1998) defines knowing as the degree of participation and engagement in the world. Every member in the English department is fully engaged well beyond their contract hours and duties. They are extremely busy, even putting many hours of overtime a week.

Japanese teachers of English benefit from interacting with native teachers of English or NETs. This falls clearly under learning contexts defined by Säljö (1991) as using the help from more experienced persons. However, this learning also takes place in a myriad of different learning contexts with students and groups of people; in classrooms, clubs, meetings, events and all sorts of interactions. Learning contexts are emerging most frequently from practice or work related challenges, but also as a natural human activity as described by Säljö (1997). The teachers of this English department are often immersed into problem solving debates where everybody's knowledge and perspectives are pooled in, cross-fertilized and are made sense of as a group. Therefore learning remains a context of human practices, attending to the what, where, who and when of learning importance as highlighted by Säljö, (2009).

6.3 Teacher perceptions of learning and learning approaches.

People shape their identities through their own narratives, and the way how they see themselves has an enormous influence in their decisions and outcomes in life Watson (2009). Likewise, teachers' narratives shape their identity as learners. Their current and past narratives become an inspiration for the future and their future aspirations. In addition, life outside of work greatly shapes their work life and working habits, thus contributing to the way teachers perceive themselves and how they shape their own narratives. If teachers recognize themselves as learners, sporting high learning motivation and eagerness to experiment in as many contexts possible, they are going to be likely to have a positive and proactive stance towards learning in the future.

Similarly, teachers' preset beliefs and assumptions about learning have the power of shaping their own learning goals and limitations. A good starting point for that is teachers' predilection for informal or formal learning. This results not only in a diversity of approaches and settings to their own learning and community of practice participation, but also in the way they conduct their practices. Moreover, relations with the student body are also affected by preset beliefs if students become labeled with a narrative that renders them as less mature, shallow, unfit for higher learning or over-materialistic.

6.4 A supportive and dynamic learning environment

The most visible traits of this English department are its culture of ongoing learning, flexibility and acceptance of new ideas and approaches. New learning is socially situated and constructive where participation in social activities constitutes learning. The English department of this study is a place where interactions are driven by powerful collaboration encouraging and valuing everyone's ideas. This way of learning is definitely associated with the complexity of human activity. Learning is lived, therefore it is as complex of human experience.

This English department is fully functional, inclusive and perfectly aligned with the socio-cultural principles described by Lawler (2003) regarding Adult education. Teacher development through collaborative support and social interaction can only happen fluidly and most effectively when all the following principles described by Lawler are achieved. The following are Lawler's principles mirroring the English department of this study:

-Create a climate of respect. Teachers in this department respect each other's work and ask for collaboration politely regardless of hierarchy or seniority.

-Encourage active participation. This department gives great attention to everyone's contributions while taking time for discussions and constructive feedback.

-Build on experience. When a departmental procedure or educational approach proves its validity, it continues on as part of the department's culture until it becomes obsolete.

-Employ collaborative inquiry. Challenges are pooled in and made sense of as a group. Teachers are communicative and always consult each other about anything.

-Learn from action. Not only are they reflective to their own lessons and approaches, they also have a habit of sharing information openly with the rest of the department about their approaches, results and concerns.

-Empower the participants. Every member in this English department participates in a wide array of tasks and has access to common information. Moreover, the department's leader post changes on a yearly basis thus allowing any teacher to manage the department regardless of their seniority or work experience.

According to Heather and Phil Hodkinson (2004) communities of practice are multilayered, diversely located and with different levels across sectors as well as overlapping in various ways. Learning is directly influenced by participation rather than by acquisition. The culture and context of a teacher department is determinant to the breadth of learning among its participants. Engagement is a variable mirroring the quality of interactions and learning. Therefore, in these close-knit departments, such as in the English department of this study learning takes an extra dimension. Calderón (1999) defines this type of teacher departments as TLC's or Teacher Learning Communities. These are departments where group learning and productive synergies take place working towards common goals, fostering fully collaborative

and supportive working environments by sharing ideas, information and teaching strategies. This proactive English department has given enough life span to prosper and is clearly falling into the category of an inquiry community as defined by So (2013). These inquire communities can adopt very dynamic, critical and active stances in the way its members interact and learn from each other, regardless of their positions or careers. They see themselves primarily as fellow teachers while the contributions made by newcomers are equally valuable and welcomed as part of the group effort

6.5 Wenger's tenets of learning applied to the teachers of this study

-Meaning: These high school teachers are applying changes reflecting in their own practices. They transform and adapt their means of interaction for engaging their learners into more meaningful lessons. This is also having a learning outcome for teachers as they are learning through engagement, testing, adapting and experiencing.

-Practice: Teachers are learning by doing. They are learning from classroom interaction with students, peer interaction, meetings, finding solutions to academic and behavioral challenges, participating actively in club activities, ceremonies, rehearsals, competitions and event preparations.

-Community: Teachers are participating in many learning communities where they interact, teach, learn, and to which they are accountable to: Home classroom, other classrooms, the English department, other departments, and the rest of the teaching body, school superiors and the Osaka prefectural Board of education. Sometimes even clubs; especially if there is active participation and learning engagement on the teacher's side.

-Identity: Teachers are indeed active learners; therefore, they are experiencing constant transformation themselves. Learning is a trigger for their personal transforming their identity within their community of practice. From the new comers to the experienced, every teacher is becoming in one way or another through peripheral participation and active engagement. They are constantly moving further into or away from the learning core of decision making as their engagement intensifies or wanes.

Marginal learning Club activities are usually a great example of learning outside the community of practice for different reasons; First of all, many teachers do not have any past experience with the club activity, they are not interested, it is not part of their main purpose at school nor they are learning about it by being active members of the community of practice. Most of the times, it is also hard for them to have a long term approach to the club activity since they can be requested to change clubs anytime. On the other hand, teachers can be engaged in other types of marginal learning settings such as when they are fostering their own hobbies or pursuing informal adult education goals in their spare time and at their own pace.

Reification or the product that comes after a learning engagement in this department, manifests itself in several ways. At a departmental level, this comes as curriculum and lesson approaches, sets of long term and short term objectives, learning goals, grading standards, interpersonal relationships, departmental culture, interdepartmental relations and problem solution procedures. Similarly, at a personal level, teachers reify this into a particular teaching style, problem solving strategies, ways of interacting and conducting themselves professionally as well as for building their own personality.

6.6 Forces hampering teachers' development and well being

After reviewing the interviews and analyzing the data carefully, there is no doubt that the teachers' situation should change at many levels. From an operations standpoint, they are engaged in too many activities and enduring long shifts with a high number of unpaid overtime hours. These extremely busy and long work shifts are having a clear impact in their well-being and work performance. From a developmental point of view, and as adult learners, it is quite unfortunate that despite having multiple choices for professional and personal development, they cannot pursue them because of their busy work schedules. Even one teacher had mentioned that he would volunteer for working less hours in exchange of a lower salary.

All the teachers in this study have a heavy workload characterized by demanding curriculum goals, work schedules and a myriad of institutional responsibilities to fulfill. It is a great paradox that besides having a job position that requires, flexibility, and ability to learn and apply new knowledge on an ongoing basis, their same job-position duties and responsibilities are also the biggest detrimental force to their personal and professional development.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Commodification of education

It appears quite evidently that the current ongoing trend of educational neo-liberalism is exerting a forceful bidirectional pressure among Japanese high school students as well; from the top down and from the bottom up. The former comes in the shape of shifting towards policy that fosters more marketable skills, proving and categorizing language tests more easily, mirroring internationally standardized tests and encouraging fierce competition towards better results. The latter stems out from the students demand for education driven by interests often characterized by specific and short term goals.

The consequences of this dark side of the commodification of education based on the demand or from the bottom up can turn into an enduring catastrophe later in life to students. The process of building the students' values, citizenship, solidarity, independence and identity is an ongoing educational process that takes many years throughout childhood and solidifies during young adulthood. The only way to understand better the world, oneself and gaining the right critical thinking skills to make well meditated choices in life is by having a holistic education. In turn, an educational system chiefly driven by capitalist or economic goals is not necessarily seeking to educate more mature or developed human beings.

Teachers are increasingly aware of these two forces disrupting traditional educational values undermining their efforts and aims for a more well-rounded education. Teachers are getting worried about this short-sided approach based on higher grades becoming the main students' motivation. Some of the teachers in this study are frustrated to see that a common perception among students is that anything that conducts them to higher grades faster is

becoming the right and smart way to learn. Students are losing the patience and endurance needed for longer and well-structured learning processes. They are increasingly becoming unable to scaffold information towards more complex learning goals. Some teachers have pointed out that lately, their students appear to want the answers to the tests faster than ever, even if it is at the expense of downsizing the quality and breadth of their own education.

8.2 Recommendations for further research

The purpose of my study was to focus on teachers working in a demanding high school setting and their disposition for engaging in adult learning dynamics. This study has helped at uncovering some of the most significant impediments disrupting teachers' professional development while it has also given an outlet to teachers for voicing out their concerns. I have had indirect access to information about the balance between teachers' professional development and their personal well-being. Thanks to all of this information, this study can also be a good reflection of the greater picture concerning other English teachers across Japan and their resilience at facing the many challenges they are appointed to.

Given the scale of commitment and work obligations that these over worked teachers must endure on an ongoing basis, it is important to keep paying attention to their struggles from their own accounts. We need to focus more in what teachers think about their careers and personal lives. Every new study should have the power of implementing positive change by creating awareness and triggering self-criticism. While my study could be a useful snapshot of the current state of affairs of high school teachers in Japan, I kindly urge Japanese educational stakeholders and lawmakers to be more reciprocally zealous about the well-being of teachers.

Teachers deserve and need this kind of care and attention. They have never stopped being an example of hard work and commitment as well as a great source of inspiration to students and beyond. Teachers are, and will continue to be for many years to come, a fundamental pillar of education and society.

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Dear *(Last name of the Teacher)* 先生

Project Title: Learning contexts available for Japanese English teachers in a top tier public high school: Encompassing a demanding work environment with adult education needs.

Name of Researcher: Juan Carlos Blanco Diez

I am currently enrolled as a student in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Learning at the Linköping University, Sweden. This research is being undertaken as part of my Master of Education degree in the international Adult Learning and Global Change program.

The purpose of my research is to examine the professional development of Japanese teachers of English working in a highly demanding work environment.

I cordially invite you to be involved in this research by participating in a personal interview.

Participation in this research is absolutely voluntary, and you may choose not to participate.

Nevertheless, I will greatly appreciate your participation.

In this qualitative interview, I will ask you about your perceptions and experiences working as a teacher. The interview will be conducted at school in a quiet location and it will be audio recorded. It should last anywhere from 35 to 45 minutes.

All data collected in the interview and discussion will be analyzed and reported anonymously. As the exact content of your statements is essential to my research, your agreement to participate in this research is also agreement to have the content of our conversation recorded. This is only to allow for accurate transcribing and translation at a later date. Your name will not be used in any publication, and your personal information will not be transferred to any third party. As your free and frank opinions are of utmost importance to me your privacy will be respected. I will personally transcribe the interviews. The summary of findings will be sent to you at the end of the project. All data will be stored in a password

protected computer. In addition to the master's thesis, it is possible that the material gathered in this research may be included in published journal articles and conference proceedings.

I would like to stress that I will take every precaution to ensure your identity is not revealed. When reporting more detailed information, I will only associate your answers with your general occupation: English teacher, high school teacher, etc...

If you decide to participate in this research, you have the right to withdraw your contribution, including the content of the interview or the discussion, at any time until one month subsequent to the interview. If you wish to withdraw, or have any other questions in regards to my research, I can be inquired anytime.

Please indicate below this lines when are the most convenient times and/or possible appointment time and day for you to conduct the personal interview.

March				
April				

RESEARCHER'S STATEMENT

I have informed the above named participants of the nature and purpose of this study and have sought to answer their questions to the best of my ability. I have read, understood, and agree to abide by the Principles of Research Ethics for the Social Sciences (Swedish Research Council) in carrying out this study.

March 7th, 2016

Juan Carlos Blanco Díez

Thank you very much for your participation and interest in this research.

The following are the questions that have been asked in the interviews:

- What is your formal education background?
- How many years of teaching experience do you have?
- How many years of experience in the current post?
- How many hours do you work?
- How many extra hours do you work?
- How long is your commute?
- What are your hobbies?
- Do you want to learn anything new or are you interested in anything in particular?
- What do you think is the best way of learning?
- How do you like to learn?
- Do you prefer formal or informal learning?
- How do you learn in the workplace?
- What do you need to be able to learn what you want?
- What kind of opportunities does your workplace give you for your own learning and professional development?
- What kind of support do you have from your teaching colleagues in your own learning and professional development?
- How do you think your personal and professional development affect your career opportunities?
- How do you think your own learning opportunities and your professional development affect your role as a teacher?
- How important do you think are your own learning opportunities for your well-being?
- Do you think that teaching is becoming harder?