Teacher Development through Personal Language Learning

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This article looks at the impact of language learning experience on the practice of ten native English-speaking university teachers in Japan. Interviews show that learning a language has clearly changed how the participants teach, but that there are significant obstacles to using this experience for faculty development.

Key words : *Teacher Development, Reflection, Language Learning Experience, Pedagogy, Transfer.*

1. Introduction

I realised one day that my approach to teaching English was based as much on my language learning experience as my training and teaching experience. Many native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) working in Japan regularly take Japanese classes, and as such it could be a valuable resource for teacher development. With the help of ten colleagues, I decided to look further into how language learning experience impacts teaching practice.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the limited research available on the *naturalistic* language learning experiences of native English-speaking teachers, then the *artificial* "Language Learning Experiences" used in teacher training, some related literature and the theoretical framework.

2.1 Naturalistic Language Learning Experience

While several informal autobiographical accounts of authentic, in-service learning experiences do exist (Blaisdell, 2006 ; Hyde, 2000) only three studies found had formally collected data on groups of teachers – McDonough (2002), Ellis (2004) and Burden (2007).

McDonough (2002 : 404-405) describes simultaneously holding two incompatible sets of beliefs as a teacher (of English) and as a student (of Greek) on the use of dictionaries, dictation, paper exercises, decontextualised grammar, board copying, translation, pairwork, audio tapes, mixed-level pairs and vocabulary notebooks. Confirming these dissonant preferences with a survey of 35 teachers and 19 learners, she concludes that teachers compartmentalize their roles, blocking transfer of knowledge from the learning experience into teaching (McDonough, 2002 : 409-410).

Burden (2007) studied six highly qualified NESTs working at a Japanese university. Positive experiences in Japanese language classes have changed their beliefs about memorisation, drills, task feedback, classroom routines, pairwork and L1 use, while negative experiences have changed their beliefs about accuracy focus, chain drills, putting students on the spot and disagreeing with student opinions.

Ellis (2003, 2004) interviewed 31 Australian EFL teachers to find the effect of long term language learning experience on the beliefs and attitudes of bilingual NESTs, monolingual NESTs and bilingual non-NESTs, finding that while monolinguals focus on the difficulties of language learning and cannot draw on personal examples to illustrate their descriptions of language learning beliefs and strategies, bilinguals of both types give personal examples and speak about both the difficulties and rewards.

Burden (2007) and Ellis (2003, 2004) together confirm that *past* naturalistic language learning can impact teacher beliefs, but their subjects were not actually studying at the time of interview and it is unclear to what extent the belief changes translated into actual practice change.

2.2   The Language Learning Experience in Teacher Training

The *Language Learning Experience* (LLE) is a language teacher training technique in which trainees take a class (occasionally a very short course) in an unknown language chosen by the trainer. The results cannot be applied to the current context, as the LLE is artificial in terms of motivation, length and level (Golebiowska, 1985), and again belief change rather than practice change is the focus - not only in pre-service training contexts (Flowerdew, 1988 ; Woodfield & Lazarus, 1998) where practice is unavailable and confounded by simultaneous course input, but also when in-service non-trainee subjects are used (Lowe, 1987). As Hyatt and Beigy (1999) show in one of the few LLE studies that actually did observe subsequent teaching, stated beliefs and intentions often fail to transfer into practice.

2.3   Related literature

Lortie (1975) notes that the *"Apprenticeship of Observation"*, which we all experience by spending primary and secondary school in close contact with a teacher, can produce misleading beliefs about teaching. However research in this area tends to focus on learning as a finished experience with a negative impact on teacher education.

While literature on peer observation, particularly work on reflective peer observation (Cosh, 1999) might seem to offer parallels, this would be peer-*participant* observation. In a pilot observation I found cognitive load to be a problem - when observing I was not adequately able to participate, and vice-versa.

Finally, research comparing native and non-native English-speaking teachers (Medgyes, 1992 ; Seidlhofer, 1996 ; Üstünlüoğlu, 2007) attributes various benefits to non-NESTs accruing from their experience as learners, such as knowledge of L2 user goals and roles, knowledge of strategies, knowledge of common difficulties and having the option of L1 instruction. Most of these benefits are theoretically available to NESTs who are L2 users of their students' L1, some to any teacher with language learning experience. For example, Ellis (2003, 2004) confirms that

NEST bilinguals can also share effective learning strategies. However, Arva and Medgyes (2000) found that the perceived advantages (and disadvantages) listed were not always confirmed by observation, reinforcing the importance of a focus on specific learning experiences and practice changes.

2.4　Theoretical framework : The Reflective Practitioner

Dewey (1933 : 9, 12, 68-77) describes the actual process of reflection as starting when "more or less vague feelings of the unexpected" trigger critical thinking, which then by analogy based on experiential and received knowledge informs hypothesis formation, development, and testing by observation or experiment. Schön (1983 : 60-63) defines *knowing-in-action* as the sum of the judgements and skills used in professional practice : repetition with small variation allows the building of a *repertoire* of expectations and techniques which are drawn on when knowing-in-action is insufficient. The act of drawing on the repertoire to deal with this challenge *during* practice is called *reflection-in-action*.

I would suggest two pathways by which learning can impact teaching – *learning-initiated reflection* when "surprise events" during learning immediately change knowing-in-action and *learning-informed reflection* where learning stocks the repertoire with expectations and techniques which can be drawn on later by reflection-in-action. For example, a teacher enjoys an activity as a student, and either immediately starts using it, or remembers it years later in response to a new need.

3.　Methodology

The literature review identified a gap in knowledge between research on current but artificial learning (the LLE) and completed but authentic learning (the Apprenticeship of Observation), and suggested a focus on practice change rather than beliefs. This project therefore looks at the impact that *naturalistic* language learning experiences have had on the *practice* of *in-service* teachers.

3.1 Subjects

All thirteen full-time native-English speaking teachers working in one section of a private university in eastern Japan were asked if they currently studied Japanese – ten did, and all kindly agreed to participate. They were four female and six male teachers in their twenties to fifties from the USA, Australia and the UK, teaching first- and second-year courses in conversation and composition to classes of twenty-five to forty students.

Participants had been studying Japanese using a variety of methods at different intensities for between one and twelve years. Based on self-description and Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) level where available, four were elementary level learners while six were at intermediate level or above. While two participants mentioned only Japanese, the eight other participants had elementary to near-native ability in one or more additional languages. Participants had been teaching English for between two and ten years – five had teaching qualifications at K-12, EFL certificate or EFL Masters level. Pseudonyms were chosen by participants – biographical details and quotes are reported separately to preserve anonymity.

3.2 Context

Participants described six types of study. Firstly, *community classes* were low- or zero-cost textbook based conversation/exam focused courses hosted by the local government and run by volunteers trained in-house. Secondly, *private classes,* which according to participant descriptions differed from community classes in cost and class size, but not curriculum, methodology or subjective judgements of teaching quality. The third, *language exchange,* was when the participant and a Japanese speaker (often non-teacher) met each other in an informal setting – participants mentioned conversation, writing and help with exams. Fourthly, *self-study* was used to describe either independent use of a textbook, focus on learning Chinese characters (kanji) or intensive reading/listening using authentic materials such as comics or TV. Fifthly, *"picking it*

up" was the most common phrase used when participants characterized exposure to Japanese in daily life as a form of study appropriate to their needs, including extensive reading or listening with authentic materials, and interactions with friends and partners. Finally, *"High School"* and *"University"*, while not common, were the oldest language learning experiences given.

3.3 Data collection

This is an exploratory description of a naturalistic context, using qualitative methods and interpretive analysis. Researcher observation of teacher or learner classes would disrupt the context for little advantage – only participants know which experience has changed which aspect of practice. Participant observation would address this, but has ethical issues (see discussion) and issues with cognitive load (see literature review).

In piloting, structured interviewing was impossible given the exploratory aim and the lack of existing research, while in unstructured interviews teachers often drifted into unconnected teaching and learning anecdotes. Semi-structured interview was chosen, with probe questions keeping subjects on topic while allowing flexibility. The aim was to elicit specific learning experiences and the resulting practice changes, to avoid the problems of belief-only change outlined in the literature review.

A pre-interview briefing covered purpose, anonymity and data handling. Each participant was interviewed once, and recordings lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. In response to note-taking issues in piloting, a collaborative form of note-taking was used. The participants and I stood at a blackboard and worked together on a mind map, encouraging a peer-collaborative atmosphere, allowing immediate factual correction and a shared visual context of previous turns, unexplored statements, connections and contradictions. Bias is inevitable when the interviewer's interpretations and interests are visible like this, but it is a transparent bias compared to a normal interview.

The process was as follows. First participants' Japanese learning experiences (time and type) were elicited and written on the board. Then their other language experiences were elicited. Then I asked :

> "So…The idea is that, as a teacher, taking classes or studying might have some effect on how you teach. Have you ever felt that?"

As themes appeared, they were written on the board (by myself or the participant) and joined to specific learning experiences already there with lines. The themes were later used to generate initial in-vivo codes. This board diagram was expanded as far as possible using non-directive prompts, then each branch was returned to. Together we explored previous turns ("*Earlier, you mentioned…*"), clarified unclear statements ("*What did you mean by…?*"), clarified the source ("*Where does …. come from?*"), and most importantly confirmed that a practice change had occurred and the theme was not just an unapplied belief ("*Can you give me an example of ….?*"). This was repeated until the theme was exhausted, then I selected the next unexplored branch of the developing board diagram and recast the original general question until no new branches were available.

3.4　Analysis

The interview data were transcribed verbatim and emailed to participants for comments and corrections. A cut-and-sort analysis method (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) was used, with the in-vivo mind-map codes as starting points. Biographical data has been aggregated and pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity, but the data was analysed separately for patterns. Several methods of higher order reorganization were tried – by source, application and transfer type – but the most comprehensive was by aspect of practice change. A draft of the results section was submitted to participants, meaning they have been involved in analysis at three stages – in collaborative data collection, checking transcripts and member-check of the final quotes as used below. The aim is

to present participants own words as faithfully as possible, to allow readers to decide for themselves the relevance of the results for development and research in their own context.

4.   Results

There are five sections – participants' stated opinions, higher-order patterns found in the data (biographical information, type of learning experience, type of transfer), a list of the specific impacts and a description of a failed follow-up development project.

4.1   Stated opinions

Responding to the question "So…The idea is that, as a teacher, taking classes or studying might have some effect on how you teach. Have you ever felt that?" The use of a statement and a closed question was intended to avoid the confusion a multiple-clause version of this question caused during piloting. It worked, and the question provided a strong springboard for the interview. However, clarity comes at the expense of bias – while negative and weakly positive responses here (by Frank, Jamal and Steven) are consistent with the low number of impacts they later related, strongly positive answers are not. For reference, though, here are the statements :

> *Georgia : uh I think it does. I think … I learned more about teaching … than I did about Japanese*

> *Amy : Absolutely! I was a beginner and through those classes I really saw how the more experienced teacher handled beginners, and for me that was invaluable, and it really changed the way I teach*

> *Serena : Well yes, absolutely,*

> *Sidney : Yeah I'm sure it must. Absolutely.*

Ray : *Definitely.*

Jamal : *Uh…. Yeah, I guess like…..Um. Well I mean a lot of stuff is stuff that I knew or I learned through teaching*

Adam : *Absolutely. Especially when I'm put in a higher level class.*

Steven : *Yes, ah, on the way I teach, sometimes.*

Sam : *Yeah definitely. I think uh…if you're not really actively studying, sometimes you don't really put yourself in a student's shoes, as well as you do when you are … actively studying.*

Frank : *An effect? Sure I guess.*

4.2　Patterns in participant biographical information

The five participants who related more than six impacts (Sidney, Georgia, Amy, Serena and Adam) were compared to the five participants with under four impacts (Ray, Jamal, Sam, Steven and Frank).

Both groups contained members at the higher and lower ranges for number of languages studied, total length of study, variety of study method and accumulated teaching experience.

Group A were taking, or had just stopped taking, regular classes at the time of interview. Group B were sporadic self-studiers whose last classroom experience was one to five years in the past. Note that any practice changes that were made in the past might still be part of current practice – what is being measured here is the ability to recall the learning experiences that informed practice change. However, this lack of access to older source experiences would presumably also impact repertoire availability in support of current reflection-in-action. This is not merely a recency effect – Group A drew frequently on learning experiences dated up to a decade in the past. My interpretation is that while both groups have similar learning histories, Group A's ongoing class-

room experience was not only adding new items to their repertoire but keeping their schemata for similar past experiences active and accessible.

Possible alternative explanations exist. Firstly, as self-study correlates with "sporadic" study, perhaps activity level rather than type is causal. Secondly, I socialized more often with colleagues in Group A, possibly making them more likely to share aspects of their practice. A combined explanation would be that longer average residence in Japan predicts both higher language proficiency and established social networks, resulting in diminishing returns from language classes (leading to reduced attendance and reduced learning schemata activation) and a lower frequency of socialisation with colleagues.

However, with such a small sample it is impossible to confirm or rule out any alternative explanations. Future research should use a larger sample or a more homogenous group, and development projects need to pay attention to social relationships. As confidence is reduced in any attempt to draw conclusions from quantitative analysis, the main outcome of this study is the list of specific impacts given below (in 4.5) in order that readers can draw their own conclusions about whether they are relevant to their own context or useful for informing their own professional development.

4.3　Patterns in the type of learning experience

Of the 49 impacts found, 30 came from classroom Japanese learning in Japanese, a further six from previous non-Japanese classroom learning, three from self study, six from increased ability in Japanese, and four from comparisons of multiple classrooms and languages. Classroom learning was therefore (with the caveats outlined in 4.2) the most important influence on teaching.

4.4　Patterns in transfer from learning to teaching

In the literature review, two hypothetical transfer pathways were suggested- learning-initiated and learning-informed reflection. Both are

present, but not enough were dateable to show which is dominant. However, another perspective on transfer emerged from analysis, drawing on the classification of Perkins and Salomon (1988): low road transfer (copying an activity, a teaching style or materials from learning into practice) and high road transfer (requiring extraction and subsequent application of general principles).

Low road transfer occurred when participants copied an activity, teaching style or materials from learning directly into their own practice, or re-evaluated an existing part of their practice. Re-evaluation could be positive or negative, increasing or decreasing use of the activity/style/material concerned.

Three types of High Road transfer were identified. Firstly, participants *re-evaluated existing theoretical knowledge* (e.g. the importance of learning styles) in the light of experience, which then led to practice change. Secondly, participants used their own experience with Japanese teachers of Japanese to create a *projected learning history* which they use to interpret student behaviour – see Hyde (2000: 268) for similar reasoning in a Hungarian context. Finally, participants used their own needs as L2 language users to construct a *projected needs analysis* describing students' future language needs (authenticity, emergency language, skills) and learning needs (dictionary use, atmosphere, learning styles). This was then used to support curriculum choices.

4.5 Specific Impacts

The 49 instances of participants describing a way in which language learning experience changed their practice are given below under ten teaching-related headings. As many quotes are given as space allows, others have been summarised. The aim is to let the participants' own words suggest ways in which learning can be a resource for teacher development, with a minimum of contextualising commentary.

4.5.1 Curriculum

Teaching authentic language : Sidney was concerned about the au-

thenticity of the language she was using in daily life and teaching in her class.

> *Sidney : …try to avoid the what I do in Japanese, which is express something in an awkward way… So I try to provide that for students – useful phrases or words that come up, correct expressions that they come up with which sound very awkward*

Teaching Reading and Writing : Adam re-evaluated the importance of reading and writing, having studied basic level reading and writing in a Japanese class.

> *Adam : …once they learn how to read and write they can start teaching themselves – they learn faster, …not necessarily a class at this level, university level, but when I'm teaching children…*

Dictionary skills : Sidney, talking about a university course that included dictionary skills, says :

> *Sidney : I had a really good teacher who taught us how to use a dictionary, which sounds so basic but he was excellent … I try and encourage students to see the limits of a dictionary, look at the example sentences.… is this actually a central meaning of this word or not.*

Teaching Emergency Language : Serena and Georgia both re-evaluated the importance for students of repair strategies, and now teach more emergency language. This is an example of the "re-evaluation of existing knowledge" pathway described above :

> *Georgia : I remember the first time I had to teach emergency language in class I thought "huh – why are we teaching this?" …but it's become more and more important as I've taken the Japanese class and understood "Oh! They really could USE this"*

4.5.2　Error correction

Serena did not enjoy the strict accuracy focus of her Japanese teacher, and projected this part of her learner history onto her students, using it to explain their reticence when called on to answer in class. Her new practice is to always give students an "out" – a fixed answer to reduce anxiety. This is an example of the "high road transfer" described above.

> **Serena :** *My Japanese teacher will be like really hard on me, for not getting something right and really criticise me....So it again helped me with, empathise with that so I'm more aware of where they came from like high school wise and the kind of teachers they've probably had ...that's why I give them the option of "if you don't want to make a decision, here's your answer."*

4.5.3　Revision

Sidney, Serena and Georgia's experience with revision and homework as learners has changed their interpretation of homework non-completion and the type or quantity of review they do in-class. In Serena and Georgia's case, this is from experience in community classes, in Sidney's from all types of personal study.

> **Sidney :** *I understand more that revision is absolutely essential.... Any words that I've picked up somewhere, I just do not remember unless I do them 4,5,6 times. If I use them again and again. Not just writing them but speaking them, hearing them... So I try to make an effort to revise words, but it's very difficult sometimes to find time to do it. But. At the very least I don't get exasperated with them at all now if they don't remember something I told them last week. Any irritation I probably felt when I was first teaching, I don't have that sense any more. It's like "uh, that would be me"*

> **Serena :** *I understand what it's like to show up and not have looked*

at anything for a week … it's not the biggest part of my life….. I don't just teach a point and then leave it, I always have the first thing in their class be a review of the last lesson…And then I continue to rotate language and bring it up again

Georgia : …so that's three past lessons brought into this lesson. Which I would not have thought about doing. I would have only thought about the previous lesson….

4.5.4 Class management

Georgia pays more attention, where possible, to assigning partners at the same level, after noticing it made a difference in her community Japanese class. Sidney's negative experience of having her teacher interpret questions as argument in a community class changed the way she interprets student off-task talk :

Sidney : …so when students try and test now with stuff, I think I can recognise that…. I'll try and even sometimes pull the question out of them… often it's a very valid point, like something I would never have even thought might be confusing

4.5.5 Activities and Materials

From positive experiences, Amy copied the game "Battleships", while negative experiences with quick-talk warmers in a community class made Georgia decide to try silent warmers. In terms of materials, positive experiences led Amy to use more pictures to avoid translating, while Sidney uses cartoon illustrations to lighten the classroom atmosphere. Steven imports materials directly from self-study by reversing and adapting the exercises in his Japanese text.

Sidney encourages students to record *themselves* speaking, having herself enjoyed this in University, but after a negative language lab experience repeating *teacher*-recorded monologues would never use that technique. Steven learned a new drilling technique from his Japanese

teacher, while Serena and Georgia both changed their approach to drilling after experiencing it in community classes:

> *Georgia : I think drilling is something that – again – probably discounted because I thought it was so boring for me, how could it be exciting for the students, but now I can see that in circumstances it's really important.*

4.5.6 Rethinking Received Knowledge

Georgia, Serena and Sidney had already been familiar with the VAK/ VARK model of learning styles, but difficulties in class forced a re-evaluation of the model's practical relevance. This in turn changed their practice – they now offer multiple input types.

> *Georgia : I looked it up after I took a Japanese class I thought "What kind of learner am I?" "Why am I not responding…to just the audio?" …I found that I was kinaesthetic … until you really experience it in class you're not/I don't think I was as aware of it as I was before…. I've been more conscious of employing different activities…So for comparatives I had visual prompts…then I had them physically do a sheet where they had to work with a partner and find different things that were bigger smaller more expensive*

> *Sidney : [my teacher] tends to talk at me….even though I can follow her, it's not my preferred way to absorb information. I'm quite a strong kinaesthetic learner….as a student I can really see that it matters…I really try to include listening stuff, because frankly I don't care that much about um listening as a way of absorbing information, but I try to use that. I also try to use pictures … I try to write things as well as say them…I used to feel like "Oh, this is taking too much time, probably not worth doing that" but now …. I would even be inclined to put students in classes based on their learning style*

4.5.7 Delivery

Anxiety : Sidney and Adam have both had negative experiences with community class atmosphere, and now pay more attention to the impression they give in class :

> *Sidney : going to the community college and a private teacher has made me understand that sense of fear that students have. So. Trying to be pleasant. Just making an effort to just smile. I know it sounds like kind of a small point but I don't think it is – actually DO you smile in your class? I'm not a very good smiler, but I yeah I'm trying to smile for the ones that look like they need it.*

Presentation Style : Adam had a positive experience which also changed his presentation style :

> *Adam : I've had some teachers that were really animated, and so that I've learned from them … in the way I actually like present a visual, miming or something probably improved from having these other teachers*

Pacing : Sidney had a negative experience with a class that moved through the syllabus too quickly, and so changed the way she paces material :

> *Sidney : I used to feel more concern like my class was keeping on track with what I was supposed to be delivering as a teacher. <My current Japanese teacher is> powering through for the sake of preparing students for the test….And I kind of realised that just powering through what needs to be done – probably not a useful outcome really*

Checking : Sidney (in an exam preparation class) and Adam (in a community class) had similar experiences of being placed in classes above their level :

Adam : *when I'm put in a higher level class. I find myself sinking, treading water furiously, so I find that when I teach I can recognise it in my students…I would say it gives me more patience as a teacher….I can slow down the learning process, because I know with myself that I need just a few extra seconds to think about it, or change to a new student y'know? If a student's confused, so I'll ask another student so they can learn from it.*

Sidney : *I'm starting to realise that sitting there looking happy and silent may in fact have no idea what's going on…. I'm taking more trouble now to really check "Do they understand?"*

Pitching Language : Jamal's negative experience with a private teacher and Amy's positive experience with a Spanish group class made them more aware of the language they use in class.

Jamal : *He'd think of something and "Ah" start telling me a story in completely natural Japanese, and it was like … so hard. And the next minute, he'd like "Kore wa nan desu ka" like y'know completely beginner Japanese…I think I try to be aware of pitching my language, y'know, not making it too easy or too difficult for the students.*

Amy : *maybe the first lesson I learned, and that I sort of integrated straight into my lessons was the pace of the activities − slowing everything down and also the way that the teacher talks… <my current Japanese teacher> doesn't adjust her language to our capabilities…. by my Spanish teacher explaining to me, an absolute beginner, something in very slow Spanish, I just mimicked that and did it back to my students in English, even though they had a little bit more knowledge than I did of Spanish and it generally produced a lot better results kind of thing − they were less confused*

Modelling : Georgia is more careful with modelling following a nega-

tive experience in a community class.

> **Georgia :** *My teacher <…> hand you a pencil and you're looking at it "So what do I do with this pencil?" well, maybe she wants you to ask, you know, someone else if they need to borrow a pencil or something but unless situations are modelled/And so I think my modelling has really really improved in class 'cos I try to think about "How would I understand this if I couldn't speak the language"*

Wait time : After negative experiences, Georgia and Sidney increased the time before they expect an answer or ask a question after presenting material

> **Georgia :** *I've had to physically tell the teacher to give me time to think because in Japanese class she'll ask me … a question and expect an immediate response. I know we've talked about that about before … of how important it is to wait. But my gosh until you're actually in that situation… I've been more patient with my students – after that.*

Topic : Sidney praised a teacher with the confidence to follow students' interest without keeping too strictly to the topic in a higher level, but reported no impact, perhaps for a lack of high-level classes. Amy compared a professional and a volunteer teacher's approaches to being sidetracked, and to solve the issue herself now adds a summary at the beginning of class.

> **Amy(professional) :** *if we had a question that was unrelated she would answer it, but she would go straight back to the subject…she kinda just showed me that with a really low level class, just stick to what you're doing, keep it/and just be rigid with that and it really helps actually too*

> **Amy (volunteer) :** *she tends to flit about from subject to topic as in*

there's no set curriculum …we would finish the class and so like I didn't have any sense of achievement, so and I couldn't really see what I'd done. …so that made me think that maybe that's how my students felt, when <Amy>'s been doing that … on reflection, they might feel that there are all these bits that they have learned, but they hadn't really progressed,

Amy (change) : *….at the beginning or very close to the beginning of every lesson, explaining to my students this is what we're going to do today …as we do the sheet I normally write a list up of what we've done so there'll be page references*

4.5.8　Sharing learning experiences

Empathy for students is a common theme, but is not reported unless it has been applied in a practical way. Georgia, Sam and Steven verbally share their own experiences of learning in order to reduce stress, to offer a model of success or to build relationships.

Georgia : *whenever she has to stand up and speak, she absolutely panics…I know I'm not as extreme, but I spoke with her and said "I'm the same way. I panic and I I just y'know." Well I did the gesture – heart pounding hard – and she did calm down, that relaxed her, and she stopped freaking out.*

Sam : *If your students realise that you're studying too…they can kind of feel what you're going through or appreciate that you are actually doing it as well. If I can go "hey what are you talking about, last night's game?" or whatever, and they go "Oh wow maybe it is possible to learn a language or have my listening skill improve, because look even dumb old <Sam> can do it"*

Steven : *of course you become more aware of how difficult it is to acquire second language skills, so you can empathise with the students*

more. I try to reassure the students that "Well, you know, I learned this when I was 6, so you guys are learning when you're 18, so I understand how difficult it is for you ... So I try to make them not so stressed out about it, if they're not picking it up the first time.

4.5.9 Knowing students' L1

With higher than average fluency, Adam, Ray and Sam mention being able to recognize L1 interference, which impacts their error correction and preparation.

Ray : *I found that I could identify a lot of the mistakes that the Japanese students were making.....a lot of the other students, because I didn't speak their languages, alright, I thought they were just making mistakes.... it made me point out overemphasize certain points that were obviously trouble spots for Japanese students*

Adam : *Whereas before I would be like "Why are they saying that? That's crazy? Who taught them that?" ... I know it's a mistake that's common, then I'll prepare for it*

Sam : *probably in preparation more.... Fast and Early. You know – "I wake up fast every day". And you know where it's coming from,*

Frank, while learning kanji, noticed how the characters chunk to form words, and changed his presentation of future tense :

Frank : *everything as an idiom. ...studying kanji made me think that that's how my students think anyway...just think of it as a unit, "going" and "to"*

Adam mentioned multilingual metalinguistic knowledge that he noticed after learning his third language :

Adam : If you know many languages you can pick commonalities, and sometimes when you teach it you can break it down into something that's easier for them to understand

Sam also uses Japanese to understand the classroom chatter :

Sam : *I think they kind of ....y'know not in my own paranoia, but in a way they know can't sit around and talk about just about anything.*

4.5.10　Using students' L1 in class

Only two participants mentioned speaking in Japanese for actual instruction and class control. Note, participants may have been unwilling to describe the full extent of Japanese they use in class, as their in-service training strongly discouraged it.

Sam gives the Japanese terms for parts of speech in order to :

Sam : *...speed things up a bit...until I think they're really understanding it every time I say verb and noun and adjective and adverb*

Amy uses translation in class, but notes that it can be appropriate or inappropriate depending on context – following two quotes are in the first instance about her professional group L3 classes, and in the second about community Japanese classes :

Amy : *it was appropriate to where sometimes translate for absolute beginners. She showed that...it can just make things a lot smoother and faster just to translate if you can.*

Amy : *our teacher always speaks and explains to us in English, and I just I feel very strongly that it is not necessary for her to be doing that.*

4.6   Failed Development project

At the end of each interview, participants were invited to try a developmental project – to keep studying as normal, but if any learning-initiated reflection occurred to change their practice, to make a note and share their experience in a meeting six weeks after the interview. In the meeting, while a productive discussion occurred based around the insights from the interviews, participants reported no new changes. When asked, the active studiers said simply that nothing interesting had happened. It is possible that learning-initiated reflection events become less common as participants habituate to the experience – that at this point their classes were "mined out". Again, clearly dated experiences or a longitudinal study are necessary to clarify this point.

5.   Discussion

In conclusion, language learning has definitely had an impact on practice in this group of teachers. Learning initiates and informs reflection, by both low-road transfer and by high-road transfer of personal experience as projected needs analysis, projected learner history and the modification of existing received knowledge. These characteristics are tentative conclusions for this specific group, not generalisable to other groups. For that reason, the main outcome of this dissertation is simply the list of impacts above (4.5).

Themes in the literature reviewed overlap to a certain extent with the results, providing some confirmation and a source of extra quotes to support reflection. See Burden (2007) for drilling, calling on students and boardwork ; Ellis (2003) for vocabulary, repetition and content delivery, tolerance for student L1 use and metalinguistic knowledge ; McDonough (2002) for bilingual dictionaries, dictation, vocabulary learning, the importance of written work and pairwork ; Medgyes (1992 : 348) for modelling language learning success, modelling learning strategy use and anticipating difficulties using L1 instruction ; and Seidlhofer (1996) for understanding the source of L1 interference.

It seems likely that the recall of past learning experience is enhanced

by having recent classroom learning experience, and that a formal classroom context is the most influential form of study for teacher development. But more research is needed to confirm the best context of study and the best method of enhancing recall and transfer, before any one approach can be recommended. Such research needs to be careful to avoid increasing the scrutiny of Japanese language teachers without informed consent, and to avoid increasing the financial and organisational burden so far that the disadvantages of artificial LLE return.

For now, the easiest way to incorporate the results of this study into practice is to enhance learning-informed reflection - as part of a normal reflective cycle, insert a stage where teachers deliberately consult their own learning repertoire, using the categories and quotes given above. For example, when concentrating on curriculum, teachers could take time to write down ten things they liked or disliked about their past learning experiences, then identify and reflect on dissonance between their student and teacher perspectives, using the categories and quotes as a guide.

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