

Exploring pedagogical reasoning skills: How native English speaking teachers and non-native English speaking teachers approach a reading lesson

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Summary

In Japan native English speaking teachers now work alongside their Japanese counterparts at all levels of education. Yet the differences between these two groups of teachers have not received a great deal of attention in the second language education literature in the Japan context.

This qualitative study uses a case study approach and compares reading lessons planned by three native English speaking teachers and three non-native (Japanese) English speaking teachers in the Japanese tertiary education context in Japan. Participants were initially criterion-selected on the basis of currently working, or recently having worked, for the same mid-sized women's university and junior college in Japan. One additional participant from a different institution also took part after one of the original teachers withdrew early on in the study. Teachers were asked to plan a 50-minute lesson, for a typical university class, based around a short story provided for them. The story that was chosen featured a moral dilemma, dialogue and narrative and some challenging vocabulary. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants over the course of three emails after receiving and initially analysing their lesson plans. These aimed to discover how the teachers' espoused beliefs interacted with their pedagogical reasoning skills to create the plan. Teachers were therefore asked specifically about the rationale behind some of the tasks and activities in their lesson plans, and also about their own language learning and teaching experiences. Data analysis took place cyclically as new data from each participant came in, with one teacher's responses potentially influencing the questions asked to the next teacher. Once all the data was received it was coded following a concept mapping procedure.

The analysis revealed that the Japanese teachers tended towards rather mechanical reading lessons with elements of grammar-translation and a limited range of objectives. The native English speaking teachers, meanwhile, created generally communicative and learner-centred lessons with more detailed lesson plans and varied lesson formats.

It is suggested that the differences may result from a combination of factors. The first of these relates to past language learning and teaching experiences and teacher training. For the Japanese teachers, a primary influence seems to be past language learning experiences. Participants report that they teach the way they were taught and this is reflected in their lesson plans. For the native English speaking teachers, however, it is training in communicative methodologies that seems to have had a strong influence on their espoused beliefs and their lesson plans. The second important factor that is discussed is related to the contextual constraints brought about by the Japanese university system. Student and institutional expectations were revealed to be a driving factor influencing the lesson plans of the Japanese teachers in particular.

Impact statement

The study described in this dissertation has potential impact in three areas:

- encouraging teacher development through peer observation
- increasing teachers' awareness of appropriate methodology
- highlighting the need for clear lines of responsibility within institutions.

The case study highlights the need for close collaboration and mutual understanding between teachers from different linguistic and educational backgrounds working in the same institution. Although collegiality of this kind is desirable in all teaching situations, this study suggests that it is particularly important in contexts in which teachers whose first language is English (NS teachers) are teaching English alongside their local L2 English colleagues (NNS teachers). Focussing on a specific task – planning a reading lesson around a given text – the study elicits a series of responses that are no less heartfelt for being familiar: the lack of awareness of how their counterparts teach, the relevance or otherwise of BANA approaches to a TESEP situation and the constraints of context.

The study also touches on the more uncomfortable aspects of this professional cohabitation, in that the complete segregation between the NS and NNS teachers in the institutions concerned has led each group to underestimate the effectiveness of the methods employed by the other. It is disturbing to note that the NNS teachers think that the NS teachers cannot address grammatical issues and equally disturbing that the NS teachers imagine that there will be little focus on comprehension when a text is used by a NNS teacher. There is also a lack of real understanding of the other's role, with the NNS teachers bearing responsibility for students' success – a success that is more or less guaranteed in the Japanese system - while NS teachers, who come from a different educational background, are willing to fail students who do not achieve the required standard.

Another issue highlighted by the study is the choice of methodology for a particular context, with a tension arising between an *appropriate* methodology and the *expected* methodology. The numbers in this study are very small but it is interesting that both the NS and the NNS teachers maintain their practices despite their awareness that some modification might be necessary. In the case of the NS teachers, they are aware that institutional requirements and student expectations are focussed on the final examinations more than on improving communication skills. Similarly, the NNS teachers appreciate the need to develop students' oral skills but design their teaching with examination pressures and students' prior learning experiences in mind.

The context of this study was Japan, where the government has promoted the employment of teachers whose first language is English throughout the education system and where the British Council has a well-established Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme that provides English language assistants to Japanese schools. However, other national systems that promote the use of NS teachers could usefully learn from the findings and encourage peer observation as a first step towards mutual respect of each other's professional skills.