

Launching out into the Sea: Identity Development of Novice Japanese Teachers of English

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Abstract: This paper presents the results of a narrative analysis of semi-structured interviews with two novice English teachers, *Mami* and *Shoko* (pseudonyms). Both participants were female teachers in private junior and senior high schools in the Kanto area and were invited to reflect on their first-year experience during the interviews. The purpose of the study is to investigate how first-year teachers perceive their professional identity to be influenced by interactions with their students, mentors, and other teachers, using Wenger's (1998) community of practice (CoP) as a theoretical framework. As previous studies have shown (Gu, 2013; Tsui, 2007), identity formation is a complex and highly contextualized process. The participants in this study form their multiple identities by engaging in shared practices in the communities and by coordinating their behaviors along with students' needs, veteran teachers' practices, and norms valued in their schools. Another interesting finding is that the effects of mentoring seem to be influenced by whether mentors hold competence and status recognized in the community or not.

Keywords: *novice teachers, identity development, community of practice, mentoring*

1. Introduction

The transition from the teacher training course to the actual teaching setting is not always smooth for novice teachers. It has been widely acknowledged that learning to teach is a challenging, complex process (Freeman & Johnson, 1998); the fantasy phrase with high hopes can quickly turn into a battle for survival, as new teachers are overwhelmed by heavy workloads and the demands of students, parents, and school. The process becomes even more challenging when new teachers feel loneliness and social isolation due to the lack of school support (Sabar, 2004; Scherff, 2008). Although a growing number of researchers (Flores & Day, 2006; Scherff, 2008; Weiss, 1999; Williams, Prestage, & Bedward, 2001) have investigated this issue in general education in response to high attrition rate of new teachers, it was only recently that studies focusing on new teachers' experience started to emerge in the second language (L2) learning literature, and relatively little attention has been paid to new teachers' identity formation process except for in a few studies (e.g., Gu, 2013; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Tsui, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to explore how novice L2 teachers perceive their identity is influenced by interactions with their mentors, colleagues, and students. Data from semi-

structured interviews with two Japanese female teachers were analyzed through the framework of community of practice (hereafter CoP, Wenger, 1998). Two novice teachers' stories reveal that they form their multiple identities by engaging in shared practices in the communities which they belong to and also coordinating their behaviors in line with students' needs, other teachers' practices, and demands of their schools.

2. Literature review

2.1. Transition from training to actual teaching

It has been established that new teachers' experience during the first year has a great impact on their future career and that perceived positive experience is related to their commitment to teaching (Gu, 2013; Scherff, 2008). Despite its significance, not much research on novice teachers has been conducted in L2 settings (Borg, 2006; Farrell, 2008; Richards & Pennington, 1998). Many of the studies on L2 teacher development have addressed their transition into a practicum (Canh, 2014; Johnson, 1996; Numrich, 1996; Sakamoto, 2004) and have shown findings which correspond to those on new teachers' experience during their first year. Pre-service teachers are shocked to see the gap between their ideal vision of teaching and classroom realities (Canh, 2014; Johnson, 1996) because realistic perspectives of teaching are rarely introduced in teacher training programs (Farrell, 2003; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Kumazawa, 2013; Xu, 2013). Their battle for survival can become severer with limited support for teachers (Canh, 2014). Student teachers tend to be preoccupied with their own teaching at the beginning, but some notice their lack of focus on students' needs after several weeks of practice (Numrich, 1996). Although such studies of short duration have provided important insights, they do not report long-term development of teachers beyond their initial stage and how they cope with challenges (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). There exist a few studies on long-term development of student teachers (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Hosoda & Aline, 2010). For instance, Kanno and Stuart (2011) is a case study of two teachers, which focused on the reciprocal relationship between their identity development and classroom practices. However, the participants were graduate students in TESOL conducting lessons as part of their M.A. program and were fundamentally different from in-service teachers engaged in actual teaching. In general, in-service teachers are more likely to be required to conform to sociocultural norms and values emphasized by each school to which they belong (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

2.2. School culture

Since the 1990s, qualitative studies featuring long-term development of novice teachers during their first year of actual teaching have been emerging mainly in Asian contexts (Farrell, 2003, 2006; Gu, 2013; Kumazawa, 2013; Mann & Tang, 2012; Pennington & Richards, 1997; Richards & Pennington, 1998; Tsui, 2007; Xu, 2013, see Table 1). One of them is Farrell (2003, 2006), a case study of an EFL teacher in a secondary school in Singapore. The teacher experienced "cultural shock" when he faced the reality of a heavy

Table 1 Qualitative studies on new teachers' long-term development
(Originally from Kanno & Stuart, 2011 with some modifications)

Studies	Focus	Context	Duration
Pennington & Richards (1997) Richards & Pennington (1998)	Coping with the first year of teaching	3 graduates of a B. A. TESL degree in Hong Kong	9 months
Farrell (2003) Farrell (2006)	Coping with the first year of teaching	1 first-year English language teacher in Singapore	1 year
Tsui (2007)	Teacher identity formation	1 EFL teacher in China	6 months but covers 6 years of development
Mann & Tang (2012)	The role of mentoring in supporting new teachers	4 EFL teachers and their mentors in Hong Kong	1 year
Gu (2013)	Teacher identity formation	13 cross-border teachers in Hong Kong	1 year
Kumazawa (2013)	Self-concept and motivation	4 EFL teachers in Japan	1 year
Xu (2013)	Teacher identity formation	4 EFL teachers in China	1 year

workload which kept “piling up like an avalanche” (p.102) and of the classroom in which he struggled with discipline problems with his students. As the first year progressed, he handled his classes better by establishing certain routines and adapting his teaching styles to students’ needs, but he did all this on his own. Forming good professional relationships with colleagues still remained challenging for him. It could be because of the individualistic culture of his school, which was apparent in his physical distance from other teachers, his limited interactions with them, and the lack of a school support system, or it could have been because of his reluctance to ask for help, or both. Perceived lack of school support is problematic since research in general education and L2 learning (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Flores & Days, 2006; Weiss, 1999) has shown that school culture has a strong impact on new teachers’ commitment to teaching.

2.3. Mentoring

Of the seven sets of studies in Table 1, Mang and Tang (2012) is a collective case study of four new teachers’ development, with a specific focus on the relationship between novice teachers and their mentors in Hong Kong (HK). Despite the value in supporting new teachers, none of the mentors were properly recognized within the schools; the mentoring job “tended to be seen by the school as just one more administrative duty” (p.482), and their unrecognized status seemed to limit the effects of mentoring. Another finding was that having an experienced or senior mentor was not necessarily an advantage. Of the four teachers, the one who showed the most positive attitudes toward the mentoring system had the least experienced mentor with only one year of teaching. The researchers argue that mentors make the most positive impact on new teachers when they collaborate by planning lessons together and sharing materials.

2.4. Professional identity development

Three studies in Table 1 (Gu, 2013; Tsui, 2007; Xu, 2013) focused on identity development, but Tsui (2007) and Gu (2013) are particularly relevant because both analyzed dynamic and complex changes in new teachers' identity through the lens of CoP (Wenger, 1998), which is also used in the present study. Tsui (2007), adopting narrative inquiry, retrospectively traced identity formation of an EFL teacher, Minfang, in China over six years. Two important sources of identity formation revealed in his story were competence valued by his community and legitimate access to practice. In his first years of teaching, Minfang's identity was marginalized in the EFL teaching community mainly because his competence in teaching was not recognized by the community; he was assigned to teach listening skills, which were valued least in the community. It was only when Minfang became responsible for communicative language teaching (CLT) that he felt he was acknowledged as a full competent member of the department. The other source was legitimate access to practice. Despite his reservations about CLT, he tried to legitimize his access to the practice of teaching CLT by aligning his practice with that approved by the institution and complying with its requirement to obtain a master's degree in TEFL. With rich narrative data, this study depicts the complex interplay between individual and contextual factors in the process of professional identity formation.

Gu (2013) is another study conducted in an Asian context in HK. The study looked at the transformative process of teacher identity construction among new mainland Chinese teachers in local HK schools. The findings of Gu are consistent with those of Tsui (2007) and other current literature on this issue (Kumazawa, 2013; Xu, 2013) in that identity formation is an ongoing process, which involves "interaction between one's historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, one's teaching practice, the contextual influences of the work place and one's multiple positions within the community" (p.516). Their identity formation was even more complex because of the unique characteristics of cross-border English teachers, who were originally from mainland China and lacked local experience in HK. It was found that the teachers went through a relatively smooth process of establishing their authority in the classroom but faced more difficulties legitimizing their professional identity in the teaching community. They had little opportunity to engage in shared practices with other colleagues. Gu identified the new teachers' compliant attitude as they became more aware of the norms and values of the workplace. Alignment with lack of negotiability made them choose to give up their own beliefs and values to survive in the new school. Their struggle of becoming legitimate members of the teaching community resonates with a story of an EFL teacher in Farrell (2003, 2006), and this struggle might have weakened their commitment to teaching in HK.

2.5. Gaps in the literature

Despite emerging studies on new teachers' development, their limited number indicates that there is still need for more L2 studies in this area (Borg, 2006; Farrell, 2008; Richards & Pennington, 1998). Moreover, the majority of existing studies are short-term, focusing on new teachers' development over a practicum, but not during their first year of teaching.

Exceptions are the seven sets of studies presented earlier in Table 1. Of the long-term studies, only three (Gu, 2013; Tsui, 2007; Xu, 2013) explored the issue of teacher identity development, but all of them were conducted in China, not in Japan. To address the gaps, this study focuses on identity formation of new teachers in Japanese secondary schools, using Wenger's CoP as a theoretical framework. The research question the present study attempts to answer is:

How do novice teachers perceive their identity to be influenced by interactions with their students, mentors, and other teachers in Japanese secondary schools?

2.6. Theoretical framework: Wenger's Community of Practice (CoP)

As seen in Tsui (2007) and Gu (2013), one of the powerful frameworks to analyze a complex process of identity development is the model of CoP presented by Wenger (1998). In this framework, identity is not a static object, but on-going and constant becoming. Identity is one's lived experience of developing practice within each community. We belong to many communities of practice at the same time, and therefore, identity is more than just a single unity but should be regarded as a nexus of multimembership. Being one person requires reconciling various forms of membership, and this process is understood as negotiation of meaning. According to Wenger, identities are formed among "tension between our investment in various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (p.188). Identity development, in other words, is a dual process of identification and negotiability. Identification is building identities through the investment of self and defines which meanings matter to us. Negotiability, on the other hand, determines the degree to which we have control over the meaning making process. Inability to negotiate and claim ownership of meaning due to unequal power relationships can lead to non-participation or marginality.

As a source of identification and negotiability, Wenger (1998) explains three modes of belonging: engagement, imagination, and alignment. The work of engagement is primarily the work of forming communities of practice and requires the ability to participate in meaningful activities and interactions. Identity of new teachers can be interpreted as their participation and negotiations of meaning around a shared teaching practice in the community (Gu, 2013). Imagination is the process of relating ourselves to the world beyond the community of practice where we are engaged by transcending time and space. The third mode is alignment, the process through which we coordinate our actions and practices in accordance with a broader context. For example, novice teachers may experience alignment with students in a particular class, veteran teachers in a teaching community, or institutional requirements of a school. Wenger argues that since alignment involves power, it is often achieved through allegiance and compliance.

Another important source of identity formation in Wenger's (1998) CoP is competence. When we are full members in a community, we can handle ourselves competently. That is, we know how to engage with others, understand why other members do what they do, and

also share the resources they use to communicate or conduct activities. We experience competence and are also recognized as competent. In this sense, “identity is an experience and a display of competence” (p.152).

3. Research methods

3.1. Participants

The selection of participants was based on criteria sampling; they were new English teachers with one year of experience in Japanese secondary schools. I used my personal and professional network to find first-year teachers who were willing to participate in this study. Mami and Shoko agreed to take some time out of their busy schedule and share their experience during their first year which started in April 2013. Table 2 summarizes basic information about the teachers; both work in six-year, private junior and senior high schools (JHS, SHS, hereafter) in the Kanto area. More detailed description of the participants and their schools obtained from interview data follows.

Table 2 Description of the participants

Feature	Mami	Shoko
Degree	B. A. in Information communication	B. A. in Foreign Studies
Job experience	None	2 years in an insurance company (sales)
School where they work	Private, co-ed, JHS & SHS Suburban: Saitama	Private, single sex, JHS & SHS Urban: Tokyo
Year they belong to	3 rd year in SHS (SHS3)	3 rd year in JHS (JHS3)

Mami teaches in a six-year, private, co-ed school in Saitama. She likes the school policy emphasizing students’ academic and athletic accomplishments because it is more or less similar to her own school’s policy, and this is one of the reasons why she chose to work there. Teaching became her first career after completing her bachelor’s degree. In February 2014, when the interview was conducted, she was a full-time English teacher with no HR duties and was in charge of third year students in high school (SHS3) with two other English teachers. One of them, a male teacher in his 30s with three-year experience, was her assigned mentor. He was the first person that she would talk with when necessary. On the day of the interview, she was busy organizing a one-day school event for art education. Her teaching was almost over since there were no classes for SHS3 in February and March.

Shoko is a full-time teacher in a six-year, private girls’ school in Tokyo and is also a graduate of the school. She spent her school days as an honor student, whose name most teachers were able to recognize, and returned to the school for her three-week practicum when she was a senior student. During two years of working for a company to “experience the broader world” (Shoko, Interview), she realized there was a gap between her beliefs and the company’s policies and decided to change her career into teaching which she had

been interested in for a long time. Shoko seemed comfortable teaching at her own school, partly because she knew most teachers quite well. She has an assigned mentor Ms. Maeda. Ms. Maeda is also a graduate of the school and about eight years more experienced than Shoko. She used to work there full-time, but at the time of the interview, she was working as a part-time teacher and also as Shoko's mentor. Actually, Shoko was introduced to me by Ms. Maeda, my one-year senior from university. Shoko has known Ms. Maeda since she was a high school student. It seems that Shoko finds Ms. Maeda very approachable and has established a friendly and positive relationship with her. In the academic year of 2013, she taught three different years: first year and third year in junior high school (JHS1 & JHS3), and second year in senior high school (SHS2). At the time of the interview, the end-of-term exam was taking place and she had some free time on her hands.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Data for this study was collected mostly from audio-recorded interviews with each participant, which were conducted in either February or March 2014. The teachers were each asked to complete a quick survey on their bio-data and send it back via email in advance, which was thought to be time-efficient, and also helped me be more prepared for the interview. Due to limited time, each participant was interviewed once at a coffee shop, in an area that was most convenient for them. On the day of the interview, Mami was busy organizing a school event and barely found some time out of her tight schedule to meet me at a café late in the evening. The priority in choosing a place was what was convenient for her, and the café was not an ideal place for interviewing because of its size, atmosphere, and location. It was relatively small, busy, and located at the nearest train station from her school. I was constantly monitoring people around to make sure there were no students from her school. This all could have affected her and caused the occasional marked hesitations during the interview. The coffee shop Shoko selected was, on the other hand, more spacious and less distracting. She looked comfortable talking about any subjects that came up, and we spent extra an hour chatting informally after the interview.

Both interviews were conducted in Japanese, and each lasted about one hour. The interviews were semi-structured; I entered the interviews with prepared questions and followed the leads that emerged as the interviews went on. Although the data collection was conducted in a short period of time, I was able to establish a relatively positive rapport with both participants because (1) they were all introduced to me through my personal network, and (2) we share the experience of working as an English teacher in JHS and SHS. This study takes the position that interviews are socially constructed (Miller, 2011; Talmy, 2011) and that the rapport with interviewees helps us co-construct meaning and knowledge during the interviews. However, the fact that their colleague and mentor are my friends and that I am more experienced than they are should have influenced the way my participants talked in the interview as well as the project as a whole.

I transcribed all interview data and translated it into English. Though the main research focus was to interpret the teachers' lived experiences in the process of identity formation, I

paid attention to not only *what they spoke*, but also *how they spoke*, for example to their voice changes or marked hesitation because interviews are considered as social practices (Miller, 2011; Talmy, 2011). Data analysis started with iterative listening to the recordings, reading interview transcripts, and note-taking in the margins. Coding was conducted deductively by applying Wenger's (1998) framework to the data. Among some emerging themes, I focus on engagement and alignment in this paper.

4. Findings

The stories of each teacher are presented separately around the analytical points: engagement and alignment with their colleagues and students.

4.1. Mami: Limited engagement with other English teachers

In response to the fact that some young, female teachers had quit their job, Mami's school newly introduced a mentoring system in April 2013 and hence, she was assigned a mentor, one of the two English teachers teaching third year senior high school students (SHS3) with her. She, however, did not seem to recognize his role fully, as evidenced by her saying that he was "my mentor of sorts" and that feedback he gave on her classes was "too detailed" but not substantial. Excerpt 1 starts with my asking a question about the other teacher who teaches SHS3. Y and M refer to Yukie (the researcher) and Mami, respectively.

Excerpt 1

Y: What kind of consultation do you have with the other, female teacher?

M: Well, well, consultation ...

Y: It doesn't have to be a consultation, or could be a small chat ... or you might solve problems on your own ...

M: Well, I am the type who thinks on my own first, and then when I still don't know what to do, I'll ask. This is for both teachers. The female teacher, sitting next to me, talks about things that are not much related to classes, makes small talk, so I just chat rather than consult ..., but she always cares about me a lot, so I feel grateful.

Mami's engagement with the two teachers was rather passive and limited; instead, she resorted to books and Internet sources to learn new ideas and perspectives for her teaching. Interestingly, this theme of her limited engagement came up a few times in the interview. For instance, in reflecting on her pre-service teaching program at university, she had not met teachers that she particularly got involved with. Similarly, Mami did not have a lot of engagement with her mentor during the practicum, saying "he was kind and nice in a positive way, but lax and half-hearted in a negative way" (Mami, Interview). The mentor during her practicum provided her only positive feedback and never advised her on how she could improve. Because of such experience, she might have learned to try to figure things out on her own.

4.2. Mami: Lack of negotiation in English teacher community

Related to limited engagement, Mami's identity of non-participation was found in her attitudes toward English teacher meetings. After some hesitation, in a small voice, she started to describe that the atmosphere at the meetings was "uncooperative", by which she meant that basically no one would speak up unless they were explicitly asked for their opinions. First, she got confused with the unengaging atmosphere, because it was different from her previous experience of attending some meetings conducted by NPOs, where opinions were actively exchanged. Although she did not think she would be afraid to speak, the atmosphere simply made it difficult for her to say anything at the meetings. Underlying this atmosphere was a group of teachers in their 50s who were "not very keen" in her eyes. There seemed to be separate groups of full-time teachers: younger teachers in their 20s and 30s and those in their 50s. She said that some older teachers were irresponsible in their assigned jobs and that their classes were not well-received by their students. Wenger (1998) explains that non-participation can be interpreted as a source of disengagement, boredom, or a cherished sphere of self. Mami's non-participation in this case, did not seem to result from her resentment or marginalized identity in the community of English teachers; rather she distanced herself from such unmotivated teachers, but aligned herself with young teachers as a strategy.

4.3. Mami: Negotiation with students preparing for university entrance exam

It was a big surprise for her to find out that she would be teaching SHS3 at the end of March in April 2013. Mami felt pressured and wondered if she could serve the role well. In the interview, however, she reflected on her first year of teaching as the most fulfilling year despite some challenges. The data revealed her efforts to align her teaching with the needs of her students. One example was aligning her pace of teaching with the perceived needs and levels of students as follows:

Excerpt 2

Y: So you taught SHS3. Did your students influence you?

M: My students ...?

Y: [Nodding]

M: Well, first, they were all serious, but didn't give me many responses. So, I conducted a survey, hoping that they could write what I should improve, if anything. I had as many as four writing classes. Some students wanted me to speed up the pace. I was spending too much time on exercises, so now I have stressed a sense of speed.

Meeting students' needs was one aspect of competence valued in the class, and plausibly in the school, but Mami appeared to recognize that another aspect was "producing results". Twice in the interview, she mentioned its importance as shown in Excerpts 3 and 4.

Excerpt 3

Y: Can you tell me a little bit more about some reflections and challenges for the

future?

M: Okay, I just recently analyzed the results of the center examination and calculated the average mark for each class. In the classes I taught, some students did not score as well as they could have, so when I saw it, I thought I should have done my lesson in this way or that way. I couldn't produce results, so that's the biggest thing.

Excerpt 4

Y: Do you have any image of an ideal teacher that you might want to be?

M: I think high school students want to follow teachers who conduct good lessons, so I want to attract students in this sense. Another thing is producing results, this is the most important thing.

Y: So you say it is important to attract students with your classes and also produce good results. What do you mean by attracting students?

M: Well, it may depend on the types of students, but I want to tell them that they don't have to take [learning] as just studying in a traditional sense, but it could be fun.

For Mami, being a good teacher embraces two qualities: producing good results and having students realize the fun of learning English, but these two might not always match. In fact, she repeatedly said achieving results was most significant, but did not mention much about the second quality except when she said once that she made supplementary materials with more visuals and fewer texts so that her classes would not become monotonous and boring. Although it was not clear from the data, competence in producing results especially when teaching SHS3 might be highly valued in the teaching community as well as in the school as a whole that emphasizes both academic and athletic achievements. In such a context, she might align her practice with that of the community or the school. Similarly, the data did not provide evidence to judge whether her competence was recognized in the community or not, but Mami's identity seemed to form around her gaining more competence in producing results.

4.4. Shoko: Engagement with other English teachers

Unlike Mami, Shoko fully appreciated having Ms. Maeda as her mentor, who always contacted Shoko and asked how things were going at exactly the right time. Ms. Maeda's experience - being not just a part-timer, but also being a graduate of the school, having worked full-time for several years, and having completed her M.A. in TESOL -all contributed to her full membership in the teacher community. With her status and identity, Ms. Maeda was able to organize a new practice: workshops for English teachers. In the workshops, Ms. Maeda shared what she learned in her M.A. programs; for example, she gave short lectures, invited a guest speaker, had other teachers self-reflect on their teaching, and asked them to share activities which worked well. The workshops were not compulsory, but in Shoko's eyes, most English teachers were willing to attend them. What Shoko appreciated most about the workshops was that they created opportunities for her to

talk with her colleagues. In other words, Shoko saw them as great opportunities to engage in a shared practice with other English teachers, who were normally too busy to share their ideas in a relaxed manner as they did in the workshops.

Another new practice was informal observation. Shoko and her colleagues who were teaching third JHS3 observed one another's lessons to see what it would be like to teach English through English, as required in the newly changed Course of Study. This observation system emerged based on the actual needs in the community, not because Shoko was a novice teacher. It means Shoko was able to engage in the shared practice as a recognized member of the community.

4.5. Shoko: Negotiation with a mixed group of students

One of the challenges she faced was teaching a SHS2 class with a mixture of *returnees* and *general students* (non-returnees). For her, the two groups differ distinctly not only in the levels of English, but also in some characteristics; *returnees* give opinions frankly, do not hide their test scores, and seldom speak ill of others behind their back. Shoko's *othering* of returnees was based on her experience of being a general student at the school, as evidenced by her saying that the first time she mixed with returnees, she felt it was "like an encounter with the unknown". In the SHS2 class, the top class in order of achievement, however, she was trying to engage in a shared practice in the class to learn together.

Excerpt 5

- S: There are 34 students and more than half of them are returnees. When I did a small quiz, there were so many suggested answers. They know English, so they fired question after question, "How about that?" and "How about this?" I got confused with so many different answers every time and I was at a loss ... But they are all motivated, ask me questions, and their questions are on a high level, so it is like I have also learned a lot from them.
- Y: When you had various suggested answers, how did you cope with them?
- S: I answered on the spot if I was able to. Or I opened a dictionary, saying "Okay, let's check it out together." If I still didn't know, I took it home and asked an English native speaker if it's okay.

Although this class had been tough for Shoko, she credited rapid-fire, pointed questions from students to their motivation and she tried to involve her students in problem-solving. In other words, she and her students were engaged in a shared practice of learning.

4.6. Shoko: Negotiation of teaching approach

In addition to the SHS2 class, another class Shoko mentioned was JHS1. It seemed that she established and maintained good rapport with the students. At the beginning of her first year, Shoko received advice from Ms. Maeda to incorporate more pair or group work in her class, and she tried to make alignment with the practice suggested by her mentor. In summer, however, she was told by a veteran teacher, their HR teacher, that some students

said they did not understand English because Shoko did not explain grammar much. Her first reaction to this comment was “What, really ...?” But then, she decided to observe what veteran English teachers did and how they taught grammar. What she found was that the veteran teachers explained grammar more explicitly than she did. She negotiated meaning to reconcile different demands, expectations, and the practices of her mentor, more experienced teachers, and students. She reflected on her approach, saying “I put too much focus on communication” and learned to incorporate grammar to some extent in her classes.

5. Discussion

The study investigated how novice English teachers in Japanese secondary schools perceive their identity to be influenced by interactions with other members in communities, including their students, mentors, and colleagues within Wenger’s (1998) CoP. The data showed that of the three modes of belonging, their identities were formed especially through engagement and alignment.

5.1. Competence in knowing how to engage with other teachers

In Wenger’s (1998) framework, competence is an important source of identity formation, as existing studies on teacher identity development (Gu, 2013; Tsui, 2007) have shown. Competence, according to Wenger, embraces three dimensions: knowing how to engage with others, knowing the enterprise in which people are engaged, and sharing the resources they use to communicate and practice activities. Consistent with the findings of studies in both general education and L2 contexts (e.g., Farrell, 2003, 2006; Scherff, 2008), Shoko found that in general her colleagues were extremely busy and were not always available when needed. Full-timers at her school, compared to part-timers, were preoccupied with things other than teaching and had little time to care about new teachers. However, thanks to the workshops initiated by her mentor, she was able to gain opportunities to engage with her colleagues and share teaching experience and materials. Moreover, to prepare for a new guideline change that requires teachers to teach English through English, Shoko and her colleagues started a new practice, that of observing one another’s classes informally and exchanging feedback. Competence in knowing how to engage with other busy English teachers has enabled Shoko to form her identity as a member of the community of English teachers at the school.

Mami’s story, however, painted a different picture; the interview data revealed her limited engagement with her mentor and colleague who were also teaching SHS3. The fact that her mentor’s role had not been established at the school might have limited the effectiveness of mentoring (Mann & Tang, 2012). Furthermore, Mami did not fully recognize her mentor either, because of his lack of experience in teaching in JHS and his rather unconstructive feedback on her lessons. Thus, whether mentors possess competence valued in the community and by mentees could be a key factor in the mentor-mentee relationship. Yet,

it is not just her mentor who is to blame for Mami's limited engagement in the community. She attributed her non-participation at the English teacher meeting to the "uncooperative" atmosphere, and thought that this resulted from the friction between older teachers with little motivation and younger teachers. She aligned herself with a group of younger teachers and distanced herself from the other group of unmotivated teachers, and thus Mami's non-participation was not a product of marginalized identity in the community. Rather, it could be her active use of a strategy not to belong to the community of English teachers including both keen and less keen teachers. Her identity as a non-participant might be different from Gu's (2013) finding that new cross-border teachers aligned themselves with the school culture as compliance and consequently gave up their own beliefs and values.

5.2. Alignment with students and other teachers

In the community of the classroom, both teachers engaged and more often aligned with their students' needs. Their alignment with students was achieved not through coercion but more with their own initiative. On the other hand, alignment with other veteran teachers or school practices involved more power, as Wenger (1998) points out. For example, in her SHS3 classes, Mami conducted a survey to find out the needs of her students who were giving her few responses and little feedback at the time. In response to the results of the needs analysis, she aligned her pace of teaching with the perceived needs and levels of students. What struck me from her interview was her repeated emphasis on the significance of producing results. At the beginning of the year, she "felt pressured" to teach students preparing for entrance examinations. It might be because she knew she should live up to the expectations of students, their parents, and other teachers at the school by "producing results". She tried to gain professional competence by aligning her practice with that approved by other members of the community, and this alignment was a major source of identity formation for Mami as a competent English teacher who was able to achieve good results.

Shoko found it challenging to manage the SHS2 class which was made up of a mixture of returnees and other students. However, she made the class an opportunity for her to learn with them, rather than for her to teach top-down. She recognized students' competence in English and also regarded them as full members in the community, which led to mutual engagement in the class. Shoko's story regarding the JHS1 class demonstrated her ability to negotiate between different teaching approaches. Although she tried to coordinate her teaching practice with that of her mentor and also veteran teachers, she was not coerced into aligning herself with one particular approach; rather, she had control over negotiating meanings and her ability to negotiate seemed to contribute to her peripheral participation.

6. Conclusion and limitations

In response to the limited research on new teachers' development, this study investigated how they perceive their identities to be influenced by interactions with their students,

mentors, and colleagues in Japanese secondary schools. The stories of two participants were analyzed through Wenger's (1998) framework of identity formation. As Wenger points out, the teachers belong to multiple-communities, such as those of the school, their classes, English teachers, and full-timers, and their identities are formed through identification and negotiability. Due to time constraints, however, this paper has mainly focused on two modes of belonging: engagement and alignment. The preliminary findings of this study showed that Shoko's engagement with other teachers and her ability to reconcile multi-memberships through negotiation of meanings helped her form her peripheral, legitimate membership, which in the future will probably lead to full participation. However, Mami's limited engagement with her colleagues, non-participation at meetings, and alignment with the value of producing results without much negotiation of meanings seemed to prevent her from gaining full membership in the community. Interestingly, whether their mentors hold competence and status recognized by other teachers or not, could influence the effects of their mentoring.

Although the findings of this study could contribute to understanding complex identity formation of novice teachers, there are many limitations of this study. First, the data was based on the two teachers' reflection on their whole year, but interviews were conducted only once. Second, the data was almost exclusively based on the interviews; observation of their actual teaching in the classroom or interactions with other teachers in a teachers' room could have provided more evidence to support the findings from the interview data. Third, this study narrowed down the research focus into two modes of belonging: engagement and alignment. However, gender can be another important issue here, for both participants were young female teachers, and their identity as such should influence their identity formation in school. Despite these limitations, one of the research implications of this study is that Wenger's (1998) CoP is a powerful framework to analyze the complex process of teacher identity formation, and I will use it in my next longer-term study to follow a group of new English teachers.

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