NEGOTIATING THE EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF GRADUATE STUDENTS IN AN AMERICAN TEACHER-EDUCATION PROGRAM IN JAPAN

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Abstract

This qualitative narrative inquiry explores the experiences of Japanese English language teachers enrolled in an American teacher-education MA program. Overlooked in the transnational-education movement in Asia is the applicability of the imported modes to the indigenous contexts, which are heavily influenced by centuries-old, Confucian-based cultural expectations of how education should be delivered, and what its ultimate effect on society should be. This study intends to examine the impact of a progressive MA American teacher-education program on indigenous in-service teachers working in an East Asian country following the Confucian curricular tradition, Japan (Marginson, 2011; Whitsed & Volet, 2011; Whitsed & Wright, 2011). In particular, it will look at teachers who experience a transformational learning experience in the program (Dewey, 1938, 1988; Mezirow, 1991, 2000), that is, buy-in with the principles and philosophy of the intervening foreign model, and explore the experiences of these teachers as they attempt to adjudicate between the two systems. The questions explored were: 1) What is the experience of in-service teachers enrolled in a progressive MA teacher-education program in Japan working in a traditional environment? And 2) What are the factors, cognitive and sociocultural, that influence the extent to which teachers feel the progressive principles acquired through their education can be adapted and applied in their traditional context? The research followed a qualitative, narrative inquiry design. Data was collected and analyzed through individual interviews and document review of participants’ reflective work while in the program. Coding and analysis followed guidelines in keeping with a general inductive analysis. Keywords: transnational education, teacher education, East Asia, transformative learning theory.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem & Significance

International and transnational education programs in East Asia are concomitantly increasing with globalization. Unfortunately, many Western higher education programs assume that context and culture are irrelevant as they provide education employing pedagogy and theories of education not necessarily practiced or accepted in the host country. In teacher preparation programs, for example, such disparities of approach can lead graduates to experience conflicts between what they learn in the foreign program and what is expected of them as teachers in their indigenous contexts.

With an increase in the transnational movement of curricular and pedagogical orientations from West to East, it is important to understand the effects of these intervening models in areas of the world with significantly different educational traditions. Particularly within the context of teacher education, this issue gains added significance because there can be sociocultural expectations of teacher behaviors and practices that are not consistent with those of the foreign model. This theoretical shift in educational approach can lead indigenous teachers to feel conflicted between the two systems – the traditional model, and the intervening foreign one – which can significantly complicate how teachers conceptualize and engage in their practice as well as how they formulate conceptions of self in a community of practice.

Practical and Intellectual Goals

Practical goals. The practical goal of this study was to examine the impact of a progressive American Masters teacher-education program on indigenous in-service teachers working in an East Asian country following the Confucian curricular tradition, Japan (Marginson, 2011; Whitsed & Volet, 2011; Whitsed & Wright, 2011). In particular, it looks at
teachers who experience a transformational learning experience in the program, that is, experience *buy-in* with the principles and philosophy of the intervening foreign model, and explores the experiences of these teachers as they attempt to adjudicate between the two systems.

As the branch-campus movement intensifies, particularly in East Asia, it is important to understand the impact these institutions have on the indigenous population they aim to serve. This should certainly be true of any transnational education program which imports a model of education for which there is no antecedent, whether an undergraduate Liberal Arts university in Shanghai (NYU), or in Singapore (Yale). However, teacher education programs pose unique threats to the normative education landscape in East Asia, as these graduates have the power to affect thousands of students by the very nature of their profession. It behooves international educators to understand the potential impact transnational education can have on the imported location.

**Intellectual goals.** At the Japan branch campus of Teachers College Columbia University, it was naturally hoped that students would experience a transformative learning experience as a result of their education (Dewey, 1938). In fact, the establishment of the Tokyo campus was intended to produce graduates who would agitate for progressive change within the traditionalist Confucian Japanese education system. However, it is necessary for international educators to gain deeper understanding of intellectual and sociocultural factors that influence the extent to which East Asian teachers feel they are able to adopt and apply the progressive principles espoused in their Western, teacher-training program in their own traditionally-bound classrooms. Therefore, a key intellectual goal of this study was to uncover and examine these potential cultural inconsistencies in order to better understand the inter- and intrapersonal
negotiation and possible conflicts Japanese teachers of English teachers experience as a result of undergoing a transformative educative experience in a Western school of education.

There are numerous students in the TC program who do not undergo a transformational learning experience, or who perhaps recognize the value of the progressive principles contained in the TC program, yet do not feel particularly motivated to act – that is, to apply the learned pedagogies and practices into their teaching. Such students were not the focus of this study. Instead, the focus here is on identifying and studying teachers who undergo transformational educative change that does translate into action. These students are under the same institutional and cultural constraints as the former group, yet despite these constraints, make the conscious decision to attempt to employ the progressive methods learned in the program. Teachers that undergo educative change that affects their actual practice potentially place themselves in cognitively and socially challenging situations. In the homogeneous Japanese context, the actions of such transformed teachers will not be without the potential for conflict with the stakeholders in the indigenous model.

**Research Questions**

The research questions served to investigate how teachers view their negotiation between the progressive principles they learned in the program and the traditional context in which they teach. The purpose of this study was to understand the effects the program has had on how teachers view their own practices and how they negotiate the sociocultural constraints of their environments. The study was therefore guided by the following two research questions:

1. What is the experience of in-service teachers enrolled in a progressive teacher-education MA program in Japan working in a traditional environment?
2. What are the factors, cognitive and sociocultural, that influence the extent to which teachers feel the progressive principles acquired through their education can be adapted and applied in their traditional context?

Theoretical Framework

This study of the effects of transnational education on local teachers was informed by Transformative Learning Theory, which was the lens through which to articulate a framework for identifying and describing students in the MA program who have accepted the progressive principles of the program. This theory was used to formulate interview questions designed to uncover any inter- and intrapersonal constraints on the extent to which teachers in the program believed they had the ability to apply the progressive principles in their indigenous teaching environment. Transformative Learning Theory is appropriate as it provides criteria for recognizing schema shifts in learners, and has long been applied in the area of adult learning and teacher education. Of key importance is the fact that the theory also accounts for agency shifts in transformed learners, that is, action that results from learning transformation. This latter point is particularly salient to this study as it attempts to shed light on not only which learners experience transformative educative experiences as a result of their education in the MA program, but what have been the effects of this learning on their day-to-day practice.

Transformative learning theory. Transformative Learning Theory has been used to describe educative experiences that result in profound changes in the cognitive processes of the learner (O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor, 2002; O’Sullivan, 2003). These experiences can be identified through stages of cognitive dissonance (Berger, 2004), critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007) or, as Mezirow (1996) refers to it, “a disorienting dilemma” (p. 163) between the old and new knowledge systems, and are fostered by supportive, attentive teachers. The
experience leads to feelings of increased autonomy, agency, and ultimately, action. This final stage of transformative education is a “call to action [and] increased capacity to engage the world and others” (Wilson & Parrish, 2011).

The theory derives largely from John Dewey’s concepts of transformational educative experience (Dewey, 1929, 1988), and has been reconstituted and further conceptualized by contemporary theorists (Germain, 1998; Kolb, 1984), most notably Jack Mezirow (1991, 2000). Dewey believed that experience was paramount to learning and that this experience would lead to and inform further experiences and learning. However, according to Dewey, learning does not occur without critical reflection designed to “assess the grounds” of the movement from one’s previous schema to the new (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). This new knowledge, then, can lead to reflective action (Mezirow, 2000), whereby the learner re-examines his or her previous schema, and alters it going forward. Thus, these changes in schema originate mainly through constant reflection, as reflection “is the apperceptive process by which we change our minds, literally and figuratively” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 5). Critically reflecting on an experience ensures against employing only one’s pre-existing knowledge to assess it, but rather using that previous knowledge to build new knowledge and understanding.

This theoretical framework is particularly appropriate for a study looking at the Teachers College Columbia program for both John Dewey and Jack Mezirow, the major contributors to the theory of transformative learning, both spent most of their careers at the college as teacher educators, and their impact on the overarching philosophy of the school (what is often referred to as the “TC Way”) is undeniable. One of the goals of the Teachers College MA program is to fundamentally affect the way the students perceive themselves as teachers and how they approach their practice. Mainly this is achieved through sustained critical reflection by students
in the form of regularly maintained reflective journals, instructor and peer observation and feedback sessions, and other assignments intended to maximize student reflection on their developing teaching philosophies and practices (Hale, 2012; Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Fanselow, 1977, 1987). These governing principles of the program lend themselves well to Transformative Learning Theory in that they both promote the educative change outlined in the prevailing literature, as well as provide concrete evidence for instructors in the program to empirically identify students who have undergone transformative change as a result of their learning. In order to help educators recognize when transformative learning has taken place, Wilson and Parrish (2011) have drawn upon the literature in the area in order to consolidate the features of transformative education into three major categories, personal meaning, competence and relationships. Each of these categories is then comprised of identifying sub-components:

1. Personal Meaning
   a. Lasting impression
   b. Resonance
   c. Part of the person’s narrative
   d. Mythologized by the learner

2. Competence with the subject
   a. Significant restructuring of subject matter schemas
   b. New generative stance
   c. Agency, efficacy and empowerment
   d. Positive shift in interest, values or attitudes toward the subject matter

3. Relationships
   a. Strong feeling of connection toward an instructor or learning peers
b. A call to action

c. Increased capacity to understand alternative points of view

(adapted from Wilson & Parrish, 2011, p. 3-4)

In order for an educative experience to be transformative, it must acquire personal meaning for the learner. The experience should have resonance beyond the classroom and influence how the learner constructs their self-image. Students in the TC MA program can exhibit this feature as they begin to define themselves as “products” of the program (i.e. as “TCers”) and how their education begins to color not only the way in which they view their profession and academic field, but themselves. Competence with the subject is also important as learners begin to make connections between what they learn and what they know, and how this leads to further abilities and growth, moving them beyond the status of novice practitioner to expert. This increased competence can lead to greater motivation to be active in the field (such as through performing action research or giving presentations, as is encouraged in the TC community) as “the learner integrates the subject into a continuing career focus, interest, avocation or passion” (p. 3). In addition, transformative learning requires supportive relationships with instructors and peers who can serve as guides to learning as well as inspiration within the community of practice. These “reciprocally rewarding relationships” help contextualize the learning and make “concrete reference points for linking knowledge about the subject matter” (p. 4). The supportive relationships characteristic of the TC MA program attempt to foster in the learners a sense of moral imperative to engage the world and make it a better place.

While Wilson and Parrish (2011) maintain that not all factors need be present to lead to transformative learning, they nonetheless provide a useful framework for evaluating whether
learning has been transformative or not. As Mezirow and Dewey stress, critical, guided reflection is an important part of this framework in uncovering transformative learning. Evidence of Wilson and Parrish’s criteria can be manifest and triangulated through critical reflection on self-report measures (such as reflective journals or written assignments), direct observation (by peers and/or instructors) and through discussion with peers (such as in focus groups). It is important to note however, that just as new schema replaces old, any study looking at transformative learning can only provide a window into a particular place in time in the life and development of the learner. As schema continue to change, so too are the suppositions surrounding the previous knowledge system. Using Wilson and Parrish’s taxonomy as a guide to analyze students’ critical reflections (as evidenced in their reflective journals, observations and interviews), it is then possible to identify students in the MA program who have undergone transformative learning experiences. This taxonomy was also instrumental in devising interview questions and guiding the individual interviews for this study.

Unfortunately, however, perhaps the most important stage of transformative learning, that of action—what transformed learners actually do with their new knowledge—is also the least studied and understood, particularly when the learned schema is not consistent with culturally situated normative practices (Taylor, 2007). In teacher education programs, it is the goal to promote the “best practices” in the field, thereby allowing student teachers entry into the field where these best practices are shared and accepted by its practitioners. However, when the best practices in a given sociocultural context are not consistent with the teacher education students receive, there is the possibility for their autonomy and agency to be curtailed (Garvett, 2004; King, 2000, 2004; Pohland & Bova, 2000; Taylor, 2003). Currently there is a gap in the literature looking specifically at “the negative consequences, both personally and socially of a
perspective transformation” (Taylor, 2007, p. 181). Using Transformative Learning Theory to identify participants who have undergone transformational educative change, it will then be possible to look deeper at the lived experiences of these teachers as they reconcile the newly learned (i.e. foreign) schema with their indigenous teaching contexts. Of particular interest is how these transformed teachers’ call to action (Wilson & Parrish, 2011) or reflective action (Mezirow, 2000), is affected by the personal and social constraints they experience in their work places—where the ideal Japanese “best practices” may not align with those promulgated in their American MA program.

**Chapter II: Literature Review**

A review of the literature is needed in order to provide the necessary context for this study. In particular, literature dealing with the pedagogical features of the progressive language education represented in the “TC Way” that students experience in the MA program will require exploration. In addition, literature illustrating the features of the English language pedagogy of the indigenous model will provide critical context for understanding the differences between them.

**Progressive Education – Guiding Question: What are the origins of the intervening Western progressive model?**

In order to understand the complexities progressive second language acquisition (SLA) teaching methods pose to East Asian traditional education, it is instructive to first re-examine the principles of the progressive movement Dewey and others championed and how they eventually influenced second language teaching methodologies in the West. Such background will make it possible to then trace the movement of these methodologies from Western English speaking
countries to East Asia, how they have been operationalized, and examine the precarious place
they hold in an otherwise prescriptive, teacher-centered educational paradigm.

The principles of progressive education taken up by Dewey and his followers had their
origins with several European educational philosophers such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel,
and Herbart. Dewey’s ideas on education overlap with the Europeans in several areas,
particulate in his belief that a child learns more deeply when he or she is an active participant in
the learning process. The revolutionary notion of putting the child at the center of the curriculum
did not originate with Dewey, and he did not attempt to take credit for it, rather, he re-envisioned
a child-centered curriculum and was able to articulate it for an American audience. In The
School and Society, Dewey even sets aside a whole chapter to discuss the ideas of Froebel,
outlining that thinker’s key ideas on education, in particular the notion of “co-operative and
mutually helpful learning” (Dewey, 1991, p. 117), through the replication of social activities.
Yet Dewey breaks from Froebel and the others in his belief that the business of the school is
more than a training ground for the specialized professions found in society. To Dewey, school
is a training ground for what it means to be a productive member of a democratic society, and
there is no greater method by which to strengthen democracy than through the interaction,
collaboration and meaningful communication. This is where Dewey makes cooperative, social
learning a unique by-product of the American experience.

Dewey did agree with the Europeans that the traditionalist approach was
counterproductive and actually resulted in less learning. He abhorred the prominent top-down
teaching methodology found in American schools, where “teachers are the agents through which
knowledge and skills are communicated and the rules of conduct enforced. The traditional
scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside” (Dewey, 1938, p. 18).
To Dewey and his progressive followers, traditionalist, formal education was a “medieval conception of learning” (Dewey, 1991, p. 26) and nothing more than a process by which students lose their very souls. Dewey and his European forbearers envisioned a learning experience where students and teachers were actively engaged in cooperative tasks: “Education is essentially a social process” whereby “the teacher loses the position of external boss or director but takes on that of a leader of group activities” (Dewey, 1938, pp. 58–59).

The notion that the teachers not maintain rigid control of the transmission of knowledge was revolutionary at the time, though to a great degree, this more active conception of learning is considered a mainstream pedagogical principle in America today – though there is considerable debate as to how much it is actually applied (Ravitch, 1983, 2011). Perhaps more than any other subject, second and foreign language instruction is well suited to the progressive approach, as language is, or should be, inherently communicative and social in nature (Chomsky, 1994; Dewey, 1991; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Mackey, 2007; Nunan, 1991; van Lier, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). However, the teaching methodologies of foreign languages went through a similar pedagogical revolution as other subjects, moving from traditionalist to student-centered.

**Second Language Pedagogy in the Progressive Tradition – Guiding Question: What are the pedagogical features of second language learning in the TC MA Program?**

In order to understand the pedagogical features of the TC Program, it is necessary to present the historical context from which the approach evolved, including the traditional pedagogical traditions the more progressive TC approach was intended to challenge.

While rarely specifically stated, second language teaching methods today owe a great deal to Dewey and the progressives. In Dewey’s day, languages were learned much the same way they had been for centuries, through rigorous study of grammar and translation. The
Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was well suited to traditional education because the teacher, as the “knower,” was able to maintain control of the learning experience. Rarely was foreign language learning based on actual communication, as the transference of a message was not the aim of instruction, rather, it was to understand and interpret authentic texts written in the foreign language. It was not uncommon for students to spend several years studying a language and lack the ability to utter a single sentence in it.

GTM was predominant until the end of WWII when the US government realized that it was in the interest of national security for Americans to actually become proficient in foreign languages, which lead to the introduction of the Audio Lingual Method (ALM). ALM was characterized by a lack of explicit grammar instruction, and instead, students were taught an endless string of grammatically correct sentences, which students repeated until they were memorized. Heavily influenced by behaviorist theories prominent at the time, it was believed that students would acquire a sufficient amount of language input, and by reinforcing correct replication of target phrases by teachers, students would become proficient in the target language. However, like GTM, ALM was also heavily teacher-centered and likewise, there was little emphasis on meaningful, authentic communication as lessons were characterized by endless drilling and repetition activities. While unlike GTM, there was actual production of oral language (in the form of repetition and mimicry), the emphasis was not on social interaction and the successful transmission of messages.

**Student-centered approaches.** As Dewey agitated for a pedagogical revolution in teaching and learning, one in which the student was an active participant in the educative process, second language educators and theorists began to realize that traditional approaches were not effective for acquisition. If language is to be a vehicle for authentic communication,
educators thought, then students must be given opportunities to experience and experiment with the language actively and, above all, orally.

In the mid 1960’s second language acquisition was only starting to develop as a distinct field of educational theory and the teaching methodology gradually moved away from the teacher-centered, knowledge-transference model to one in line with early 20th century constructivist learning theorists like Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky. By the 1980’s, second language teaching methodology had turned full circle, and meaningful communication became the ultimate goal of instruction. The approach most favored in the Teachers College Columbia MA program, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), contains several sub-methods, all of which contain clear progressive pedigrees in the Deweyan tradition.

CLT is characterized by placing an importance on the social and cooperative aspects of learning. Teachers and students interact actively together to co-create meaningful communicative input and output (Krashen, 2003; Richards, 2005; Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Swain, 2005). Unlike the traditionalist methods that preceded it, CLT places added emphasis on students’ own experiences and previous knowledge as well as linking content with real life outside the classroom (Nunan, 1991). These functions of learning amplify what Dewey stressed where student experience must inform pedagogy and classroom content should relate to the outside world. A sub-method of CLT is the inquiry-based instructional approach Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) which places at its core the notion that authentic experience is the key to language acquisition (Nunan, 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In TBLT, students are given tasks to perform collaboratively with other students, and these tasks have a direct, contextualized relationship with the world they will encounter outside the classroom. Even the
description of experiential learning in TBLT bears a striking resemblance to Dewey’s own rhetoric:

In [TBLT] experiential learning, immediate personal experience is seen as the focal point for learning, giving ‘life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process,’ as pointed out by David Kolb (Kolb, 1984, p. 28). But experience also needs to be processed consciously by reflecting on it. Learning is thus seen as a cyclical process integrating immediate experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization and action. (Nunan, 1991, p. 2)

Much of the pedagogical rationale for CLT derives from the belief that communicative language learning enhances acquisition because students must focus on creating comprehensible, meaning-focused output in which the transmission of a message is paramount (Mackey, 2007; Swain, 1985, 2005). By being in charge of the language used in communication, rather than engaging in teacher-fronted and controlled communicative acts, learners will take “ownership” of the language resulting in a concomitant increase in learner autonomy and feelings of empowerment (Anton, 1999; Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen, & Lehtovaara, 2001). Steadily reducing a student’s dependence on the teacher promotes their independent processing of classroom activities as well as self-selecting the language necessary to complete them.

According to Wang and Peverly (Wang & Peverly, 1986), learners need to be independent of their teachers in order to identify, formulate and restructure their own goals.

Second language acquisition theory today reiterates Dewey’s belief that the learners’ dependence on teacher-driven, scaffolded instruction (interdependence) should naturally and gradually evolve into student self-sufficiency (independence) where students begin to take
ownership of the learning. In SLA literature, the gradual deconstruction of the teacher-controlled, scaffold-model has been referred to as *handover* (Van Lier, 2001), *stepping aside* (Blair, 2009) and *fading* (Hennessy, Deaney, & Ruthven, 2005). These all involve a teacher’s gradual withdrawal of providing guidance as the learners increase their own self-directed participation (Hennessey, et al, 2005). The gradual withdrawal of teacher control over the learning process (the transmission of knowledge model, or “teacher as knower” model) should eventually give way to teachers “advising, structuring, guiding and assessing” (p. 268) learning. With these aims in mind, socially constructed activities seem well suited to providing students with opportunities to increase their independence by taking “ownership” of their learning and language output.

While Dewey did not specifically address second language education methods, his comments on language instruction in general complement the autonomy enhancing aims of CLT, which developed to challenge traditionalist, teacher-centered methodologies:

> Since the language taught is unnatural, not growing out of the real desire to communicate vital impressions and convictions…until finally the [teacher] has to invent all kinds of devices to assist in getting any spontaneous and full use of speech. Moreover, when the language instinct is appealed to in a social way, there is a continual contact with reality. On the traditional method, the child must say something that he has merely learned. There is a difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something. (Dewey, 1991, p. 56)

CLT and its variants are the predominant pedagogical approaches in second language instruction today in the West and are heavily advocated in language-teacher education programs, such as John Dewey’s own Teachers College Columbia, the largest teacher-training program in
the United States. The appeal of student-centered, autonomous learning is largely a byproduct of dissatisfaction with traditional classroom pedagogical approaches that limit self-directed output, such as GTM and ALM, which, while certainly out of vogue in North America, are still quite familiar to students coming from Confucian-oriented contexts (Barnes, 1992; Ellis, 1990; Gorsuch, 1998; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Zuengler & Bent, 1991). These methods emphasize a student’s ability to imitate the teacher rather than enhance self-directed, independent learning or, as Lantolf and Thorn (2006) call it, a student’s agency.

Second Language Pedagogy in East Asia – Guiding Question: What are the pedagogical features of second language learning in the traditional Confucian curriculum?

The Confucian system of education is predominant in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, Vietnam and Japan (Gorsuch, 1998; Huang, 2007; Marginson, 2011; McVeigh, 2002; Mok, 2007; Ouyang, 2003; Whitsed & Volet, 2011). While it is in many ways unique to each country in which it exists, it nonetheless exhibits several unifying characteristics, the most significant of which is an emphasis on high-stakes testing, particularly in respect to college entrance. This “one chance” examination system at the end of secondary school is largely viewed as the culminating educative act a student faces (Gorsuch, 1998; Marginson, 2011), and has implications for not only the student but also his or her family as success on the test is seen as an indicator of how much effort parents exhibited in the education of their children, including providing private tutors and enrollment in extra curricular “cram schools”. In this way, the test is viewed as “a one-off contest for university entry which determines their life chances” (Marginson, 2011, p. 57). With so much at stake, it is little surprise that the secondary education system is largely comprised of training students to pass these high-stakes examinations (Glasgow, 2012; Yamada & Hristoskova, 2011).
In Japan it has often been said that it is difficult to enter university, but easy to graduate (Kinmonth, 2005; McVeigh, 2002; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Students go to great lengths to pass the university entrance examinations, a period called “examination hell” by high school seniors (Marginson, 2011), and they are rewarded for their efforts by being given four years to, essentially, relax and socialize in university (Tsuneyoshi, 2005; Whitsed & Wright, 2011). The entrance exam system is meritocratic, giving any student an equal chance to enter an elite university; high school grades and teacher recommendations are given much less weight than the exam score as these assessments tend to be more subjective (Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Not surprisingly, the secondary school curriculum is geared largely to content likely to appear on these tests and a high school’s reputation is built upon how many students it was able to “coach” into a particular university (Gorsuch, 1998; McVeigh, 2002; Stewart, 2009). With testing prowess as its main educational focus in secondary education, it is not surprising how well Japan (and other Confucian-system nations, like China and Korea, with a similar curricular orientation) performs on international science and math tests. In Japan, due to the testing “washback effect,” that is, curriculum based on preparing students to pass external tests (E. Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ferman, 1996), it is common for high school seniors to spend the entire year engaged in “juken” (college test-prep activities). As a result, it is often lamented that what is lacking in the Confucian secondary school system is any focus on adaptive, creative or critical thinking, traits largely associated with “progressive” education in the Deweyan tradition, and arguably the most important skills in a global job market that changes too quickly for schools to prepare graduates for it (Cheung, Rudowicz, Yue, & Kwan, 2003; Niu & Sternberg, 2002; Saeki, Fan, & Van Dusen, 2001). In such an academic environment, it is not surprising that the teaching of English, which is a subject appearing on all college entrance examinations, is taught
in the most efficient way possible, using the grammar translation method (GTM) or a variation, “translation reading,” called yakudoku in Japan (Gorsuch, 1998). In yakudoku, classes are taught primarily in students’ first language, heavily teacher-centered and comprised of translation techniques of complex English passages likely to resemble those appearing on college entrance examinations (Gorsuch, 1998).

Thus, GTM is maintained in the Confucian system primarily due to its convenience and applicability to the students’ main motivation for studying English, which is to pass entrance examinations with English sections involving reading and translation of dense, authentic academic texts (McVeigh, 2002; Stewart, 2009). Therefore, the content in the English language classroom is designed to mirror this type of test question students are likely to encounter, not for the purposes of meaning-focused, social communication.

However, there has been for some time a recognition that the prevailing method for teaching English in East Asia has not led to students being able to communicate in it (with Singapore as an exception, as English is an official language), and Japan’s ranking on international English tests bear this out as it places slightly below Cambodia, and on par with Tajikistan, two developing countries without nearly the level of educational infrastructure or even access to secondary education as Japan (“Educational Testing Service,” 2013). With Japan’s Ministry of Education recently releasing comprehensive guidelines explicitly calling for children to develop “communicative ability” in English through social interaction and less emphasis on GTM-style teaching (“Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan: Elementary and Secondary Education,” n.d.), and China, Korea and Japan’s commitment to bringing in native-English-speaking “assistant” teachers (Ouyang, 2003), there would appear to be compelling rationale for finally abandoning the grammar and translation-
focused methods. However, many teachers in Japan have reacted negatively to the new guidelines, not because they do not believe in their merits, but because they believe they have no time to focus on communication in light of the importance of entrance examinations (Glasgow, 2012; Gorsuch, 1998; Stewart, 2009; Yamada & Hristoskova, 2011). It would seem that while East Asian nations have accepted that languages are more effectively learned through authentic, meaningful communication and social interaction, the high-stakes nature of the testing apparatus that exists does not allow for more than mere token exposure to these methods, which are often met with confusion and resistance by students and teachers alike (Glasgow, 2012; Tahira, 2012).

With so much emphasis in schooling placed on testing, students and their teachers trained in a traditionalist paradigm are often confused and frustrated by CLT lessons, as they find it difficult to ascertain what the point is without a teacher’s explicit instruction as to what is “important” or needed to reproduce on an examination (Ouyang, 2003; Tahira, 2012). Other students have come to realize that since CLT lessons are not usually assessed, they see the days that their teachers employ them (often when the native “assistant” teacher comes to class) as a type of “holiday” where they are free to have a rare bit of “fun” (Ouyang, 2003). The resistance to CLT teaching methodologies seen in second language instruction in East Asia follows a similar trend in other countries in the world trying to reconcile their traditional(ist) education systems with more progressive international trends promoting student-centered approaches (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). This tepid, cautious acceptance of CLT has also led to considerable frustration by Western teachers who feel that their expertise is not actually valued, and that they are nothing more than “token foreigners” employed to give the impression of internationalization, while the actual traditionalist curricular model remains unchanged (Ouyang, 2003; Whitsed & Volet, 2011; Whitsed & Wright, 2011).
In Japan, it would seem that the progressive principles of the “TC Way” are consistent with the directives of Japan’s Ministry of Education, yet the realities of the Confucian system render the directives difficult to achieve (Glasgow, 2012; Stewart, 2009; Yamada & Hristoskova, 2011). When East Asian teachers are trained in these progressive principles, accept them as a superior model, and are even given explicit endorsement by the ministries of education to employ them, the question naturally arises: How do these teachers navigate between two systems, the indigenous Confucian model that deemphasizes English for communication and the intervening foreign one that does? This study aims to approach an answer to this question, looking specifically at TC graduates working in the Japanese secondary school context.

Chapter III: Research Design

As the purpose of this study was to better understand the effects of transnational teacher education on local teachers in Japan, it was determined that a qualitative study, one which focused on the lived experiences of the teachers through their own stories, was deemed most appropriate. In narrative inquiry, the data derives from the stories of the participants themselves, as they describe the subject under investigation using their own words.

Narrative inquiry as a methodology allows for rich data to be derived from a small number of participants having experienced what Webster and Mertova (2007) refer to as “critical events,” that is, lived experiences that might otherwise not be detectable in more traditional scientific methods of inquiry, and are embedded in the stories of participants. Additionally, these events tend to occur within a community (Bruner, 1986), such as the community of practice found in a teacher education program. In qualitative research which aims to understand the experiences of participants, these critical events form one’s experiences and memories, from which future actions are filtered and informed. The research focus can be on exploring one
critical event, which can lead participants to describing other critical events in the process: “Because events are critical parts of people’s lives, using them as a main focus for research provides a valuable and insightful tool for getting at the core of what is important in that research” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 71). In the present study, through review of previous reflective work in the MA program, and observations by the researcher, it was discovered that one such critical event for participants was their initial acceptance into the MA program, which led to their eventual transformation, and they were purposefully selected (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2005) based on this discovery. Through their own stories, it was hoped that participants would reveal other critical events in their lives and practices that were attributable to that transformation.

Qualitative research, while in the past thought less reliable than more traditional quantitative methods, has nonetheless provided a means for deep exploration of individual perspectives on experience though describing those events in story form and, most importantly, in their own words. These stories are then used by the researcher to create narrative sketches of the participants and explore the events participants describe in greater detail (Seidman, 2006). In this way, the researcher is no longer separated out of the research process and analysis, but allowed to exist and becomes an instrument for data collection and analysis. While there is considerable debate regarding the extent to which even quantitative researchers are able to free themselves from their research designs and data analysis, in qualitative research, it is not only accepted that the researcher be part of the process, it is in fact expected (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Maxwell, 2005).

According to (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) researchers explore the beliefs, cultural context and human perceptions of events “to reconstruct the categories that participants use to
conceptualize their own experiences and world view. Using participants’ own constructs to frame a study is an emic, phenomenological, or subjective approach” (p. 45). This study aims to reconstruct the situated experiences of transformed teachers in an American MA program in Japan using a narrative inquiry approach that emphasizes the stories of the participants and uses these stories as data. Data derived from the interview transcripts was then be coded and analyzed utilizing a general inductive analysis of qualitative data (Thomas, 2006). Data collection consisted of two phases: 1) document review to purposefully select transformed participants, 2) in-depth interviews of the selected participants.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the experience of in-service teachers enrolled in a progressive teacher-education MA program in Japan working in a traditional environment?

2. What are the factors, cognitive and sociocultural, that influence the extent to which teachers feel the progressive principles acquired through their education can be adapted and applied in their traditional context?

**Methodology**

Narrative inquiry was used in order to explore the experiences of transformed teachers in a progressive teacher-education program offered through an American university branch campus in Japan. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in order to gain understanding of their lived experiences, in addition to reviewing their reflective portfolios while students were in the program. The researcher’s faculty position within the university, and a graduate of the program himself, provided understanding of and familiarity with the participants’ context, both as students in the program, and teachers in secondary schools in Japan. The researcher
maintained notes on the interviews, as well as reflexive notes throughout the data collection process.

**Site and participants.** The research site was the Teachers College Columbia University branch campus in Tokyo, Japan, which employs a progressive, student-centered pedagogical approach to teaching and learning which is heavily influenced by the philosophy of John Dewey.

Participants were drawn from approximately 30-40 in-service Japanese teachers working at the secondary-school level. Preliminary document screening resulted in five individuals who were contacted to participate in interviews. Of those five expressing interest in participating, three ultimately completed the in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2006).

Interviews were conducted using Google Documents in which a set of questions were added to the document in stages, and students were given time to reflect on the questions, and write their answers in an additive manner, that is, they were able add, subtract and edit their answers until they were comfortable enough with it to move on. This format was chosen as some of the participants were non-native speakers of English who required time not only to comprehend the question being asked, but time to formulate a response in a foreign language. Although all participants in the MA program have a high level of English proficiency, my experience with this format in teacher-reflection assignments has been that teachers appreciate the extra time to formulate responses, and to have the option to edit them once made. In addition, this format strengthens the participant-check mechanism, in that they have continued access to the document, and can see their responses throughout the interview process.

**Data collection.** Not all teachers in the MA program experienced transformational educative change, and with it a willingness or interest to employ progressive teaching principles in their own contexts. Therefore, it was necessary to identify a criterion sample (Creswell,
2007)—teachers in the program who have experienced the phenomenon of a transformational educative experience—in order to further explore their experiences. Document review, including student reflective e-portfolios, online discussion forum posts and student essays in which they reflected on their practice from three practicum courses were reviewed in order to identify and *purposefully select* (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2005) students who have undergone a transformative learning experience (Wilson & Parrish, 2011). Invitations were sent to all students identified as having undergone a transformative learning experience and of these, five expressed interest in undergoing the interview process.

In-depth interviews of the participants were conducted in order to produce rich, descriptive data on the lived experiences of the transformed teachers (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Seidman, 2006). These interview sessions were conducted through a shared Google Document between the researcher and each participant, on which questions were added once participants indicated they were finished with previous questions. This written format allowed for the entire transcripts to be analyzed and coded in their entirety (Seidman, 2006). Questions were developed in advance and added to the shared document in sections, which allowed teachers time to reflect on each question and formulate answers. This method was devised to accommodate two of the participants, who provided their responses in their second language, English. This format allowed time for participants to explore their experiences and perspectives as teachers working in the traditional indigenous context after having undergone a transformational learning experience (see Appendix 1 for interview questions). Discussion questions were designed to develop from open-ended questions allowing the researcher to “build and explore their participants’ responses to those questions. The goal [was] to have the participant[s] reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (Seidman, 2006, p. 15). Questions moved
from general discussion of teacher experiences to more specific, focused questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) designed to provide richer insights into the intellectual and social factors the teachers encounter in their teaching contexts as a result of their transformational learning experiences in the MA program. When the researcher required further elaboration on a response, the researcher added the follow-up questions directly into the shared Google Doc, and indicated to the participant that a follow-up question was posted. These in-depth interviews took place in April and May 2014. Three sets of questions were added to each Google Document at a time, and participants spent approximately 1-2 weeks contemplating and answering each set. Participants were free to revisit previous answers, and edit them for clarity and breadth.

Data analysis. The method of narrative inquiry was chosen for this study as it provides a means by which to explore perceptions, attitudes and personal experiences of participants having experienced transnational teacher education. Identification of participants were made after an initial review of student reflective e-portfolios, online discussion forum posts and reflective essays. The initial review was intended to identify participants who underwent a transformational educative experience in the program and once identified and selected, the work produced by those participants became context in the construction of individual participant “profiles” (Seidman, 2006). Students identified in this initial review process were contacted to participate in the study. Five individuals were selected to complete the in-depth interview questions. Of these five, two dropped out due to lack of time to spend on the questions. The remaining three completed the interview process to the end.

The resulting interview data was coded in two passes. Responses were analyzed and coded inductively (Thomas, 2006) using the qualitative coding software HyperRESEARCH version 3.0. In-vivo coding was performed in the first pass, and pattern coding in the second
pass. With each pass, the codes were consolidated into emergent themes (Saldaña, 2009) and themes which were used to create a profile of the “participant in context” (Seidman, 2006, p. 119).

Validity & Credibility

In qualitative research, the measure by which validity and reliability are measured are often quite different from positivist empirical quantitative methods. In these latter methods, the research is meant to validate a pre-determined theory or model and seeks ultimately to find what is “true,” assuming that numerical values can be assigned to, and correspond with, reality (Polkinghorne, 1988). Because of this focus on what can be measured, quantitative methods tend to overlook the complexity and nuance critical to understanding the human experience. In narrative inquiry, “qualitative truth” (Miller & Crabtree, 1999) is achieved through faithfully recording the “multivocality and complexity of the lived experience” of participants (p. 109). In this study, the purpose was not to find reality or truth, but to explore the perceptions of the lived realities experienced by the participants.

Clarifying the bias of the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Thomas, 2006) is also important and will be explicitly addressed. According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), qualitative ethnographic research does not discount the participation of the researcher in the data collection and interpretive processes. Instead, they see the researcher as an integral part of the research design because of the prolonged contact researchers have with the population under investigation. Rather than deemphasize the role of the researcher, as is the case in positivist quantitative research, the researcher’s “subjectivities are…essential to establishing and building the intimate relationships with participants that permit trust and confidence” (p. 92). Clarifying bias is important, as “qualitative researchers have long recognized that in this field, the
researcher is the instrument of the research [emphasis original]” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 37-38). In the present study, the researcher is also a graduate of TC, a faculty member in the TC Tokyo program and, like the participants, has been a teacher in the Japanese secondary school system. In addition, the researcher has taught each of the participants in one or more of his courses at TC Tokyo. Clarifying the experiences and perspectives of the researcher is necessary in order to further provide context and rationale for the study, as well as make explicit any assumptions and biases the researcher may bring to the collection and interpretation of data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Maxwell, 2005; Thomas, 2006).

Data was triangulated by making use of multiple corroborating data sources (Creswell, 2007). Three types of data were collected and analyzed: Document review (student reflective essays and online posts to identify students who underwent a transformative educative experience), and in-depth individual interviews to elaborate on that experience, which served to validate the selection of these particular participants. Finally, the researcher kept reflective notes on the process, which served to contextualize and add verisimilitude to the experiences of the participants.

In addition, member checking, by soliciting the views of the participants to ensure the accuracy of the data collected, findings and interpretations, was also employed throughout the analysis stage (Creswell, 2007; Thomas, 2006). This was accomplished in that the interview document was a shared Google Document, ensuring that the participants had constant access to their interview responses, as well as the opportunity to edit and further elaborate on their responses at any time in the interview process.

Protection of Human Subjects
In order to maintain proper ethical protocols, which include protecting the rights of participants in this study, IRB permission was sought and granted prior to conducting the research. Participants were given an informed consent form, which indicated that their rights would be protected during the data collection, storage and analysis stages. Included on this form was the following information:

• Identification of the researcher
• Explanation of how participants were selected
• Explanation of the purpose of the research
• Notation of risks to the participant
• Notification that there will be no remuneration, monetary or other, for participation
• Guarantee of confidentiality (Creswell, 2009)

In addition, the participants were told that he or she may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. As a further protection, transcriptions of the data were stored in pass-word protected accounts in Google Drive, accessed only by the researcher and the individual participant. During transcription, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

Conclusion

Using *transformative learning theory* as a theoretical lens, it was possible to identify student-teachers who underwent a transformational shift in their outlook and approach to their teaching as a result of their teacher education. Once identified, it was possible to explore in detail their experiences as transformed teachers in an indigenous context with differing pedagogical and philosophical expectations. Inviting teachers to engage in in-depth interviews then provided rich, descriptive data in which to construct profiles from the participants’ own voices. It is hoped that the results of this study will illuminate the challenges faced by teachers
educated in an imported educational model. As the transitional education movement intensifies, particularly in relation to Western models moving into East Asia, valuable insights can be gained by looking deeply at the impact of such imported programs on local teachers and education systems.

Chapter IV: Research Findings

In this chapter a brief profile of each of the three participants of this study is presented, followed by a thematic analysis of the interviews in response to each of the two research questions guiding this study.

Participant Profiles

Prior to presenting research findings, a profile of each of the three participants will be presented here. Observations of the participants in their MA program, review of reflective journals, and personal conversations and interactions over two years all contributed to these profiles. Being a faculty member and mentor in the program allowed me the opportunity to intimately understand their personal and professional experiences.

Sasaki. Sasaki had been a teacher in public secondary schools in Tokyo for 9 years. When she entered the TC MA program, she had been teaching English for 5 years and joined the program as a way to improve what she saw as her lack of English language skills. She thought that for an English teacher, her proficiency in the language was too low, and this reflected badly on her professionalism. For her, studying in an English-medium program was a way to improve the language skills one might experience while studying abroad, but without having to quit her job and take on the added expenses of living in a foreign country for several years to complete her degree. She described her reasons for entering the TC Tokyo program in terms of a kind of simulated study-abroad experience:
Even after getting BA at Japanese university, my English skills are still not enough. Although I had a lot of English lessons in my university, most of them were Japanese traditional styles such as *yakudoku* [translation reading] or lecture style. I liked English conversation classes with native English-speaking teachers, but the number of such classes was quite small, and only freshmen were admitted to take those classes. What I wanted [in a graduate program] was a simulated experience of studying abroad and I didn’t think Japanese universities could meet my needs. After all, in Japanese university, where most of professors and students are Japanese, I can’t experience Western academic culture. On the other hand, TC Tokyo could provide English-medium instruction in all courses, and half of the students were native speakers of English. It seemed obvious that TC Tokyo could provide more opportunities for me to enhance my English skills and to experience American academic styles. I hoped to realize how English is used in real communication and to participate in that. My opportunities to speak English were limited to conversation with ALTs [Assistant English Teachers] in my school. I needed more opportunities to use English.

**Asako.** Asako had been a teacher at public and private secondary schools for 10 years and entered the TC MA program in her seventh year of teaching. Asako was highly proficient in English, having lived in the United States as a child. Wanting to put her language skills to good use, she enrolled in an undergraduate English linguistics program at a Japanese university in the hopes of becoming an English teacher. When it came time to find an MA program, she first thought of her alma mater, but was not very impressed with the education she had received, as it was heavily teacher-centered and focused on producing researchers, not teachers. Her suspicions
were confirmed as she went about interviewing former classmates who later enrolled in that school’s MA program.

Her reasons for attending graduate school was in part a reaction to her belief that she had become the very teacher she herself “loathed as a student”:

I had been teaching at a secondary school for seven years when I decided to go back to school, and this was because I felt that I was not developing as a teacher, particularly in my English teaching skills. In order to develop as an English teacher, I knew that whatever I was going to do had to help me improve my teaching skills. I majored in English teaching and second language acquisition as an undergrad student, and this was the major reason why I became an English teacher in Japan. I wanted to change how English was taught in Japan, and to make English learning more practical and effective for students. I learned a lot of language learning/teaching theories for my pre-service teacher training in university, but when I actually did become a teacher, I was shocked to find that most of what I had learned was not “practical” in the eyes of other senior teachers. After seven years in such a teaching environment, I gradually came to believe what my colleagues told me, until I realized that I had become the very teacher I loathed as a student.

Asako knew she wanted to learn in a more progressive program, even while she was unable to qualify what “progressive” meant. What she was able to qualify was that her MA program must be “practical.” After seven years teaching, she lamented that her teaching “had become teacher-centered, without any chances for students to speak up, let alone use English in the classroom.” She wanted to change how she approached her teaching, and saw the TC program as the means to that end.
**Vera.** Vera is an American who had come to Japan ten years before starting the TC MA. She began her teaching career as an assistant language teacher (ALT) after receiving her BA in Asian studies from a university in the U.S. As an ALT, she would “assist” Japanese English teachers by modeling “native” pronunciation, engaging in dialogues with the Japanese teachers to exemplify a language point, or to lead various English-language games. Her exposure to a particular classroom was limited to once or twice a month, as she would be required to visit all English classrooms in all grades, often at several schools. The degree to which she could be creative in the classroom largely depended on the Japanese English teacher, who was the students’ normal teacher, and was allowed to “utilize” the ALT in anyway he or she saw fit. While such a working arrangement was satisfying to an extent, Vera knew early on in her career as an ALT that she had more to offer. She wanted to be a teacher in her own right. After five years as an ALT, she was given the opportunity to be a full teacher at a public senior high school, where she would be solely responsible for several classes, including lesson creation and assessment. It was at that time that she decided to enter an MA program, and as there were few options in Japan to study for an American MA, and only one with classes exclusively on weekends, she chose TC. In addition, she was drawn to TC because of its international reputation, as well as the positive reputation the Tokyo branch had in Japan:

I was hoping for the opportunity to interact with other professional teachers from around the world who were committed to learning about how to teach and why things are taught in certain ways. I also hoped that through entering a new environment I would have the chance to learn new techniques and strategies that I could in turn implement into my classroom.
Research Question One: Participant Experiences in their American Teacher-education Program

In the process of addressing the first research question asking “what is the experience of in-service teachers enrolled in a progressive teacher-education MA program in Japan working in a traditional environment,” questions were asked designed for participants to reflect on their experience in an American masters TESOL program in Japan. Questions specific to their context were asked, and responses to these questions were coded inductively, and themes emerged from these codes (see Appendix 1 for semi-structured interview questions). In-vivo coding was used in the first coding cycle and pattern coding was used in the second cycle. The pattern codes were then consolidated into three salient themes that represent the perceptions of the participants. The coding process revealed three salient themes related to the MA program and the effects it had on the participants’ perceptions of themselves as teachers. The themes are presented in Table 1 and discussed below.

First, it was clear that participants’ reaction to the particular pedagogical approach of the “TC Way” was highly influential in formulating how they perceived the effectiveness of the program. Their comments indicated a clear “buy-in” with the progressive principles of the program and alignment with their own, often unrealized, teacher beliefs. Second, the three teachers made several references to how their experience in the program led to significant changes in their perspectives of what effective teaching is, as well as a broadening of what they believed was their own potential as teachers. Finally, this change in perspective led to the third salient theme, which was an increased confidence in themselves as teachers, and a belief that they were capable of enacting progressive principles they were encountering in the program back in their classrooms. This confidence extended to feelings of possessing the necessary skill to
evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching. Reflecting on their time in the program, their professional contexts, as well as their national origins, seemed to influence and frame how they perceived their experiences in the MA program.

Table 1

*Codes comprising themes for Research Question 1.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representative Invivo Codes</th>
<th>Representative Pattern Codes</th>
<th>Instances in Data</th>
<th>Resulting Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Progressive theory”, “teaching framework”, “Japanese traditional styles”, “teachers can become facilitators”, “cooperative learning”, “task-based learning”</td>
<td>Like-minded, progressive pedagogy/theory, academic knowledge, American TESOL degree, progressive TC, practical application</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>“TC Way”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“changed my perspective”, “need to continue to study forever”, “view on teaching extended widely”, “broadened my view”, “in the past, control was important”, “think and reflect”, “realized there are different views and perspectives”</td>
<td>Expanding beliefs, professional identity, new ideas/approaches, widening perspective, reflection, questioning teaching</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Changing Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I feel I have more options”, “TC made me more confident and effective”, “gave me a lot of confidence”, “empowered and effective”, “they keep praising my lessons”</td>
<td>Confidence, effectiveness in classroom, lesson organization, empowerment, recognition</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Increased Confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants find affinity with the “TC Way.” Initial invivo coding of participant interview responses revealed patterns associated with the theme of achieving “buy in” with the Teachers College Columbia philosophy of best practices in second-language education. Pattern codes revealed that teachers identified with the “progressive” TC approach, and that being with “like-minded” educators helped to validate the pedagogical principles they were experiencing and give the impression of being in a supportive community (see Table 1).
Sasaki knew she did not want to enter a traditional Japanese MA program as she “had enough experiences with Japanese classrooms and thought Japanese universities couldn’t provide what [she] expected.” What she expected was a program taught in English that emphasized the communicative approach to teaching and not the lecture or translation-centric approach she experienced in classes as an undergrad. To Sasaki, the TC program represented a change in approach to education that was not available at Japanese universities. Pedagogically, this approach provided something new for Sasaki. She was surprised to see an emphasis placed on task-based language teaching, an approach that enhanced all four skills, rather than primarily reading, or more specifically, the translation reading she called yakudoku, an approach prevalent in Japanese classrooms. In addition to the pedagogical differences she experienced in the program, she was also struck by the overall structure of the classes, which emphasized communication of ideas, rather than the competitive, judgmental approach she experienced in Japanese universities: “although I experienced a lot of discussion and presentations, I didn’t have such a feeling and anxiety to be judged. Questions and suggestions to my presentations were not to judge and test my knowledge but just to invite a class discussion to develop our ideas.”

Like Sasaki, Asako wanted something that she believed was not available elsewhere in Japan. In the TC program, she found what she was looking for. However, unlike Sasaki, Asako came to the program ready for something different, something that was more attuned to what she believed represented best practices in teaching. She already did her research: “I don’t think [the TC Way] ever conflicted with my own beliefs, because I had been aware of the practical and innovative approach that TC encourages before starting my program. In fact, it was actually the reason why I chose to enroll in the program.”
Vera did not have any experience as a student in Japan, but she had spent years in Japanese classrooms as an ALT and had a sophisticated understanding of the traditional educational system. She had no desire to replicate that system in her own classroom, and in fact she was hired mainly to offer an alternative to it at her school (though students still attended traditional English classes at her school, and her courses were mainly “electives” students can opt to take.) Like Asako, Vera entered the TC program in the hopes of finding a place that offered the kind of education she already believed to be most effective. Also like Asako, Vera was interested in a “practical” education that she could put to use right away. She was not disappointed: “Without a doubt, I feel more effective as a teacher. I have been able to take the things I have learned at TC and apply them in my classroom.” In particular, she valued the practical approach to her TC education, where her lesson plans can be evaluated based on clear criteria to see if they are pedagogically sound. She also praised the teaching approaches espoused in the program, such as learner autonomy, task-based language teaching and communicative language teaching. Knowledge of these approaches gave her the professional vocabulary necessary to articulate what it means to be an effective teacher. TC illustrated for her how these “various approaches and techniques were grounded in theory.”

Changing perspectives in the program. A second theme to emerge from the invivo and pattern codes was that of changing perspectives as a result of the TC program. Participants revealed that their beliefs about effective teaching “expanded” and they began to “question” pre-conceived notions of what effective teaching actually was. In addition, this change in perspective extended to their own perceptions of themselves as ratified participants in the “professional” language teaching community (see Table 1).
Exposure to the “TC Way” lead to gradual changes in Sasaki’s belief system about how to be an effective teacher. This enhanced perspective lead to feelings of transformation about herself as an educator as previously held beliefs of her inadequacy as a teacher began to disintegrate. With a greater knowledge of how languages are learned, Sasaki experienced a sense of “freedom” that she did not have before. Joining the program provided her with “good opportunities to change [her] perspective as an English teacher. It broadened [her] view and made [her] ‘free.’” She now feels she has “a lot of options” regarding her teaching. Armed with the tools to produce effective lessons, and the ability to evaluate them critically, Sasaki’s “view on teaching and learning extended widely.” She no longer felt that she had a lack of knowledge, but that she needed to “generate new ideas” and transform the knowledge she already had through meaningful interactions with TC classmates. Through her experience in the program, Sasaki came to see the value in exchanging ideas with her classmates, rather than hiding what she perceived as a lack of pedagogical and technical teaching knowledge, which she might have had to do in a Japanese teacher-education program. Perhaps the greatest change came in how she approached testing in the classroom. Before entering the TC program, Sasaki, like many of her counterparts in the Japanese education system, relied on testing to gauge student proficiency – mainly memorization of grammar points and vocabulary. Gradually, she saw testing as an opportunity for formative evaluation to measure a student’s “transformation rather than their ability to memorize information.”

Rather than forcing a change in perspective, the TC program served to “reinforce” the belief system Asako was already developing: “Now that I look back, the TC principles may have made me become aware of the fact that I am actually pretty progressive in my thinking or teaching beliefs and practices.” While Asako believed that the TC program reinforced what she
already believed, it did actually result in changes in her perspectives as a teacher. Like Sasaki, Asako began to see “control” differently, and that giving up control can actually achieve pedagogical goals. She learned to “let go” of some control in the classroom and learned to “assess [her] students to see how much control/ power they can handle.” In addition, she changed how she used Japanese in her classroom, limiting it in ways she never had before, as she began to see the pedagogical importance of using the target language more in her lessons.

Like Sasaki and Asako, the TC program helped Vera make changes to her teaching. As the program was very practical for her, she was able to take something she learned, such as principles of cooperative-learning, and experiment with them right away in her classroom in order to determine their effectiveness. In addition, she developed a more nuanced approach to what learning means, and grew more comfortable with the notion that she may not be in control of what her students are learning in her classes. She expressed that through her time in the program, she had come to see successful learning as when students leave her classroom “more knowledgeable and confident in their English skills than when they entered.” Even if students did not acquire a particular learning objective for the day, if their language ability is enhanced in some way, “it shows effective teaching in [her] eyes.”

Teachers’ experience in the program leads to feelings of confidence. The third theme to emerge from the data related to increased confidence the participants gained as a result of their time in the program. Pattern codes revealed that participants felt they were more “effective” teachers in the classroom, were better able to “organize lessons,” and that they were finding their teaching “recognized” and validated by coworkers. Ultimately, this increased confidence led to a sense of “empowerment” that drove them to initiate pedagogical innovations in their classrooms (see Table 1).
Changes in Sasaki’s belief system led to enhanced confidence as she began to see herself as a qualified educator. One example of her newfound confidence was related to the notion of “control” in the classroom. Previously, she would find herself under great stress if she could not control her classes. If students appeared to be misbehaving or unresponsive to her teaching, she would often think she was a failure as a teacher. Her students were often very energetic, so “disciplining and punishing” them was a high priority for her as what she was afraid of most was “a noisy classroom out of control.” Such a noisy classroom reflected badly on her as a teacher, she thought, as colleagues would look at her as unskilled. This situation often caused her nightmares. However, in the TC program she learned that this anxiety was brought on by feelings of inadequacy and a belief that she was not “good enough.” Being enrolled in a prestigious MA program and interacting as an equal with other professional English teachers helped her to develop “an identity as a professional English teacher.” Learning and making efforts to improve herself gave her confidence to identify as a professional, and she no longer felt frustrated by a lack of control in her classroom, rather, she felt she was qualified to seek solutions based on her own expanding expertise as a language educator.

For Asako, seeing that the TC program validated her beliefs led to feelings of confidence in the choices she was making in the classroom, which she felt empowered her as an educator. She stated that through her courses at TC, she felt student-teachers in the program were constantly “encouraged to change [their] teaching practices for the better, and to put theories into practice in order to be innovative teachers.” She stressed that she felt “more empowered” and “more effective as a teacher” because of “confidence in how and what” she plans in her classroom, as well as the knowledge to self-assess her teaching in order to further “refine [her] teaching practices even more.” Asako was able to learn second language teaching theory and
practices she knew deep down were most effective, and this enhanced the perception of herself as a good teacher.

Vera also made several references to increased confidence as a result of her time in the program. Vera felt very comfortable in the program, as it represented her own ideas regarding best practices. However, as a foreign teacher in the Japanese system, she felt added pressure to be a “good teacher,” and to prove to her colleagues that she was competent. Through learning the theoretical underpinnings of the “TC Way,” the program provided a justification for her beliefs as a teacher, and, like Sasaki and Asako, a vocabulary for articulating them. This increased confidence in herself resulted in the belief that her students would become the ultimate beneficiaries of her own education. In fact, gaining confidence turned out to be the dominant, defining feature of the entire program for her:

I think more than anything, TC really helped me become a more confident teacher…I have found that through attending TC, I have come away with more confidence and a stronger belief that I am a good teacher and that I can have an impact on my student’s lives. I feel confident in the fact that I am teaching with, and creating, progressive pedagogy and that it will be useful to my students and affect my students for the better.

All three participants entered the program because they thought it represented something different from the Japanese alternatives. Because of their readiness to engage in progressive pedagogy, they were not disappointed by the school’s approach, but in fact were already seeking it out. In this way, they were primed and ready to achieve “buy in” to the “TC Way.” This allowed them to thrive in the program, to accept the school’s philosophy and approach, re-evaluate their own teaching, and, as a result, gain the confidence they needed to take what they were learning back to their workplaces. The second research question aims to explore that
critical second step: What happens when these teachers take progressive principles and pedagogies back to their traditional Japanese workplaces?

Research Question Two: Impact of Progressive Education on Teachers in Context

In order to address this important piece, several questions were designed to have the three participants reflect on the realities of being progressive-minded teachers in traditional environments (see Appendix 1). The semi-structured questions included items requiring teachers to describe what the challenges have been, both intrapersonally and interpersonally. Primarily, I was interested in finding out how these teachers reconciled their beliefs and negotiated with other stake-holders, and what effect this has had on their feelings of effectiveness as teachers.

The responses to questions related to the second research question were again coded inductively. In-vivo coding was used in the first coding cycle and pattern coding was used in the second cycle. The pattern codes were then consolidated into three salient themes that represent the perceptions of the participants. First, the coding process indicated that the teachers felt there were institutional limitations that hampered their ability to implement the progressive pedagogy they believed in. Institutional pressures included such factors as curricular constraints imposed by their institutions, such as having to follow a prescribed curriculum that limited class time, or an institutionally prescribed emphasis on testing. A second theme involved the delicate interpersonal pressures that weighed on the teachers, and which often led to discouragement, such as conflicts with colleagues and other stake-holders who may not understand or believe in progressive pedagogy. A third theme provided a more positive window into the experiences of the teachers in that they often expressed confidence that despite the challenges they faced, they firmly felt that they were having a positive impact.

Table 2
$Codes$ $comprising$ $themes$ $for$ $Research$ $Question$ $2.$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representative Invivo Codes</th>
<th>Representative Pattern Codes</th>
<th>Instances in Data</th>
<th>Resulting Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“which approved textbook I should use”, “artificial texts focusing on specific grammar items”, “a lot of the things I learned at TC went against what was being promoted in my school”, “Center Examination”, “limited by time quite often”</td>
<td>Curricular restraints, curricular conflict, testing, lack of class time</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Institutional Limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“education is different between Japan and the Western countries”, “groupism and a sense of unity”, “I had no authority”, “their beliefs come into direct conflict with mine”</td>
<td>cultural conflict, stake-holder pressure, unwilling colleagues, discouragement</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Interpersonal Pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“some teachers showed interest in it”, “I feel free with a lot of choices”, “continue to learn and always refresh my views”, “students responded far more positively to my teaching than I had expected”</td>
<td>making small changes, more options, seeing success, stake-holder buy-in, wanting to do more</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Having an Impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutional limitations impact on teachers’ sense of effectiveness. Initial coding resulted in patterns associated with the theme of institutional limitations placed on the teachers.

Examples of the pattern codes that emerged to form this theme were concepts of “curricular restraints,” “curricular conflict,” “testing,” and “lack of class time” (see Table 2). All teachers expressed difficulty in implementing the progressive pedagogy they were experiencing in the MA program because of limitations placed on them by their institutions, which were very much exemplars of the traditional, Confucian educational model.

Sasaki admitted that the greatest pressure she experienced as an English teacher was when it came time each year to select a textbook. The selection of books was limited to those
approved and sanctioned by the Ministry of Education, and all teachers in the school needed to agree on the same textbook, as well as how to approach the delivery of the content. As she began to experience progressive teaching methods at TC, she saw these textbooks as inadequate, and she was frustrated at having to choose a textbook that was not, in her mind, pedagogically sound. She lamented that while “most of [the textbooks] use artificial texts focusing on specific grammar items and lack communicative tasks,” she personally believed it was important to teach pragmatic competence – something the prescribed textbooks and curriculum did not allow time for. The pressure to prepare students for university entrance examinations played a large role in choosing these textbooks and further inhibited her attempts to create a communicative classroom. Yet despite her nascent attempts to promote a communicative environment, one she believed promoted language acquisition, she was constantly pressed for time to complete the prescribed number of pages each class session.

Asako was perhaps the most distraught over the disconnect between what she believed to be effective teaching, and what was prescribed by her school. She described her school as “traditional” in its approach to education in that classes were large (about 45 students) and the “classroom layout is teacher-fronted and the desks are difficult to move around.” Students are expected to remain silent throughout the hour-long lessons. This orientation surprised her and she was perplexed at the amount of testing that took place at the school saying, “they even have written tests for music, bible studies, home economics, or P.E.” While she was eager to make her classes more student-centered and task-based, she was required to focus on grammar and translation skills. The institutional pressure to focus on entrance exams caused her to lose her own focus as a teacher. After years of following the prescribed curriculum, she finally reflected on what she was doing: As an ethnically Japanese teacher of English, “I had believed (or maybe
was led to believe) that my role was to teach my students English grammar and translation skills. But when I finally stopped and asked myself whether I was really being effective in terms of my teaching, I really had no clue.”

Vera, not having grown up the Confucian system of education, expressed her surprise at the rigid curricular structure of her school, which emphasized test-taking at the expense of critical thinking and argumentation. She saw all the “required content and the students memorizing and absorbing that information. There is very little interaction among peers and virtually no opportunities for students to think critically or question what they are being taught.” These curricular constraints were at odds not only with the progressive principles she was learning at TC, but also with her own experience as a high school student in the US, where she was encouraged to question what she was taught and express her opinion. Her teaching position, however, was not restricted to teaching for the tests, and in fact the native English-speaking teachers at her school, like herself, were hired expressly to provide “communicative” learning opportunities to the students. This of course left the Japanese English teachers to handle the important work of preparing students for the high-stakes college entrance exams. This “dual system,” while at first glance provided Vera with freedom to experiment with progressive principles in her classes, also left her with the feeling that she existed merely as a “distraction” for students who received their “important” English education in Japanese. She began to feel the frustration of being a “token” foreigner, while at the same time admitting that she was fully aware that the reason they hired her was “precisely because [she] was not Japanese.”

Interpersonal pressures lead to conflict and consternation. Pattern coding revealed several concepts associated with frustration and challenge at the interpersonal level. All three teachers experienced resistance to their approach by individuals at their workplaces, often
leading to arguments, conflict and strained relationships with colleagues. Codes that fell into this theme of interpersonal pressures included notions of “cultural conflict,” “stake-holder pressure,” “unwilling colleagues” and “discouragement” (see Table 2).

Sasaki was aware that teachers were expected to focus on grammar instruction and test-taking, however, she was surprised to find that even “students wanted instruction specific to university entrance examinations.” She wondered how she could teach the way she knew was right, when all the stakeholders were so focused on university entrance examinations. She felt acute conflict between what she wanted to do, and what students expected of her. In addition, the immense pressure she felt to make sure her students “didn’t fail” their examinations, and thus allowed her to save face with her colleagues, made it even more difficult to set time aside for communicative pedagogy.

Sasaki admitted there were some teachers at her school who were interested in her ideas, but were unwilling to help her promote them to other teachers. She lamented, “while some teachers try to improve their school very enthusiastically, others are just reluctant to get involved in such reform.” Sasaki felt that the lack of interest among teachers in improving themselves, or accepting new ideas, was the root cause of what was wrong with Japanese education.

Asako was eager to improve herself as a teacher, and to employ the teaching ideas she was being exposed to at TC. As many of the concepts were quite progressive, such as following a student-centered classroom organization, she found that many of her colleagues were not interested in her ideas, and her voice was being silenced due to professional notions of respect for older, more experienced teachers. She complained that “older teachers expect younger and newer teachers to be obedient, to be respectful of the opinions of older teachers. Younger teachers are not expected to speak their mind in faculty meetings, and it seems like it is seen as a
kind of violation when they do speak up.” She was frustrated that she had no “authority to change the curriculum and syllabus.” The head English teacher challenged her ideas directly asking, “how do you know they work?” While she tried to explain the body of research associated with the communicative approach to language teaching, but this seemed to have little effect and only served to further isolate her from the other teachers. Therefore, she felt the pressure to keep her ideas to herself, and, essentially, to suffer in silence as she watched teachers promote the same old teacher-centered, grammar-based curriculum. Trying to implement more student-centered pedagogy was met with resistance and she began to feel the stress of working in an environment that did not align with her TC education:

I felt that the more I learn, the more I have had to suffer in my workplace. This was because a lot of the things I learned at TC went against what was being promoted in my school, or what was believed to be effective among my colleagues. I suffered from this gap, especially as what was being taught at TC synched with my own beliefs and instincts as an English teacher and learner.

The frustration that Asako felt at her school led her to search for professional satisfaction at other schools, both public and private. Unfortunately, she was met with similar reactions to her progressive approach by stakeholders, and the “dilemma of not being able to practice what [she] believed in grew more and more,” driving her further from the “ideal of effectiveness” she had developed in her mind. Eventually, she left secondary school teaching altogether and moved into university teaching where she “could enjoy the freedom” to teach the way she wanted to.

Vera experienced similar frustration at her workplace as she attempted to “bring in” some of the pedagogical ideas that she was learning in the MA program. Her experience as a non-Japanese was somewhat different from Asako and Sasaki in that she expressed frustration both
with her fellow English native-speaking counterparts, as well as her Japanese colleagues. Many of her native-speaking co-workers were not trained in second language acquisition, and had their own opinions about how the native English speakers’ classes should be taught. She had to “fight tooth-and-nail to implement many of the things [she] learned in TC.” For example, her desire to introduce a draft system in the writing program, something she learned about at TC, caused meetings to became very “tense and heated” because of teachers who disagreed that students could be “trusted” to evaluate their own work. In addition, the Japanese English teachers at the school, who largely taught grammar and translation, felt that time spent re-writing essays could better be spent studying for university entrance exams. Vera expressed frustration at the lack of interest in her approach by the Japanese teachers, saying, “I think that the biggest source of conflict comes from other teachers who don’t see the value in focusing on the skills of speaking and writing as they do not directly relate to the Center Exam.” Many colleagues denigrated her ideas saying that having a theoretical base for teaching is “over the top” and “unneeded for native English teachers.” One Japanese colleague even criticized her decision to pursue a masters degree at all, saying that she “is a native English speaker, and that is all that matters.”

Colleagues, Japanese and not, made it clear to her that a native English speaker’s value lies in the fact that he or she speaks the language, not their teaching ability or knowledge of how languages are actually acquired.

Despite the challenges, teachers feel they are having and impact. Pattern coding of the interview data relating to the challenges teachers faced in their workplaces also revealed an unexpected salient theme of teacher efficacy. Emergent pattern codes that fit into this theme included concepts of “making small changes,” “having more options,” “seeing successes,” and “wanting to do more.” All three teachers experienced difficulties and conflict in realizing their
true potential as progressive-minded teachers, yet all three also made several references to having a positive impact on the education of their students. Despite the hardships and strained professional relationships that resulted as a consequence of their progressive-mindedness, they were not so discouraged as to give up on their beliefs.

Sasaki expressed confidence that though there are limitations on what she can do in her daily practice, she feels that she has more “choices” now in how to circumvent the barriers she faces. For instance, although she may be faced with “some restrictions for implementation” of what she believes is effective, she is confident that she can make her own choices from the vast “stock of thoughts” she acquired at TC. She accepts the reality that change is difficult, but she believes that people can change their perspectives and practices, even gradually. One such example is her use of the progressive teaching approach of cooperative learning in conjunction with traditional grammar drills. With various perspectives come various choices one can adopt in the classroom. The fact that her students seem motivated and interested in her approaches keep her searching for the best compromise between the traditional approach, and her new-found progressive approach.

Sasaki’s students were not the only ones to notice her effective teaching. Her principal was also surprised with her approach to English education, and while not particularly supportive, suggested she apply for the highly prestigious Ministry of Education scholarship. Because the scholarship explicitly mentioned fostering more communicative approaches to teaching, she decided to apply. She was awarded the scholarship with only five other teachers selected throughout the country. As part of the scholarship, Sasaki will spend two years in the UK further studying second language teaching practices, and upon her return, she will be employed by the Ministry to develop and oversee more progressive-teaching pedagogy to be incorporated in the
new Ministry guidelines, which hope to bring communicative language teaching and student-centered approaches into the traditional Japanese classroom. These guidelines will be implemented in secondary schools throughout the country. Sasaki’s impact on Japanese English education will be profound, and no longer does she feel she needs to “hide her poor skill.”

Asako, while ultimately feeling so frustrated with traditional secondary-school teaching environments that she ultimately moved to university teaching, was approached by her previous secondary school to teach elective classes and offer teacher workshops part time. Apparently her loss was acutely felt by students and staff. Reluctantly, she agreed, and in so doing expressed strong satisfaction that she was in fact having an impact on the lives of her students as well as other teachers in a way that she had not previously. Despite her frustration when she worked there, she believed that TC “transformed” her teaching practices in that students “responded far more positively” to her new teaching approach than she had ever expected. In addition, in preparation for her teacher workshop at the school, she discovered that many of the teachers at the school carried the same fears and frustrations that she once had. She said:

By talking to them, I realized that now I can actually provide resources that would help them develop as teachers, thanks to the courses I took at TC. So now, I feel that I am effective not only in my classroom but also in my workplace, and that I am gradually making a positive impact on my students, colleagues, and the institution as a whole.

Asako has been asked to give similar talks at other schools, introducing some of the concepts she learned at TC and adopted in her own teaching. Ironically, it took Asako leaving secondary school teaching in search of more freedom as a teacher, and then being asked back, before she realized the satisfaction and validation she craved all along. At her university position, she feels she is having a bigger impact, however, as she is given the freedom she always craved. She has
even been asked to be on the English Curriculum Design Committee, where her ideas will
directly impact the curriculum of the university.

Vera, while suffering strained relationships at her workplace as a result of her writing
curriculum, expressed satisfaction that her approach has actually resulted in the same successful
outcomes that her more traditionally-minded colleagues also want: increasing the number of
students accepted into universities. Not only are her students becoming more proficient and
communicative in the English language, “more of them are getting into universities early that
require essay and interview examinations.” To Vera, her approach is justified because the results
of her teaching are in-line with the goals of the school as a whole. In this way, she feels her
teaching is beyond reproach from her critical colleagues. She sees the success of her students as
“reaffirmation” that what she is doing in class, the pedagogy she has “fought” to implement, is
helping her students prepare “for a future that incorporates English into their life.”

**Summary of Findings**

Through the semi-structured interview questions, the three teachers in this study were
able to articulate their experience in the progressive MA program. Themes relating to how the
experience has positively influenced their perceptions of themselves as teachers, and a
concomitant increase in confidence in their choices in the classroom emerged from the transcript
data. In addition, as progressive-minded teachers working within a traditionalist education
system, they were able to express the challenges they faced on a daily basis, as well as how they
negotiated around those challenges. Themes emerged from the transcript data relating to how
the teachers negotiated within their traditional contexts and included concepts of facing
curricular constraints, as well as dealing with unsympathetic colleagues, and the interpersonal
conflicts that emerged as a result. In the end, despite the challenges, they all expressed
confidence that their approach to education was the right one, and that they were having a positive impact on their students.

**Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings**

In this chapter, a summary of the problem of practice is presented followed by a review of the study's methodology. A summary of the study's major findings is discussed in relation to both the theoretical framework and the literature review. Finally, the significance of this study as it relates to transnational educational models and their effect on indigenous teachers is presented, as well as suggestions for future research.

**Revisiting the Problem of Practice**

With the intensification of international education, particularly from West to East, it becomes necessary to examine the effects these educational models are having on the indigenous context. This holds true of any recipient of the intervening educational model, but is particularly salient for teachers undergoing teacher training, as teachers have a direct impact on the education of their students within their indigenous context. Unlike undergraduates who willingly select to pursue a degree at Temple University Japan, for example, Japanese high school students being taught by a teacher educated in the imported, progressive model are affected by transnational education by no effort of their own. Particularly important to this study is examining how these progressive-minded teachers in Japan deal with the realities of their traditional contexts once they undergo transformative educational experiences as a result of their Western teacher education.

The expectation for secondary school teachers in Japan is to follow a rigid curricular model that culminates in strengthening students’ test-taking prowess. The focus of the curriculum for English education is geared toward enhancing grammatical knowledge and translation skills, which correspond to how college entrance examinations are constructed. This
curricular orientation and the associated pedagogical foci are in contrast to the educational principles contained in the Teachers College Columbia University Tokyo Masters program in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL). It is important for international educators to understand the interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges for indigenous teachers achieving “buy in” with a progressive teacher-education program while having to practice in a traditional context.

**Review of the Methodology**

This study was undertaken in order to explore the experiences of indigenous Japanese teachers experiencing “buy in” with a progressive, American teacher-education program. In order to better understand the lived experiences of these teachers, two research questions were devised:

1. What is the experience of in-service teachers enrolled in a progressive teacher-education MA program in Japan working in a traditional environment?
2. What are the factors, cognitive and sociocultural, that influence the extent to which teachers feel the progressive principles acquired through their education can be adapted and applied in their traditional context?

In order to address these questions, a narrative inquiry was conducted in which the experiences of three teachers were explored through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interview format was unique in that it allowed the participants, two of whom are non-native speakers of English, continued access to the questions and ample time to reflect on the questions as well as continued access to their developing responses. The three participants were purposefully selected because they had expressed solidarity with the progressive principles of the program through their written work in the program. The three participants in this study, two Japanese and
one American, were all teaching in Japanese secondary schools which represent the traditional Confucian structure. Through the semi-structured interview questions, the experiences of these teachers were explored and their responses coded and assigned themes. The interview format allowed for continuous reflection and revision of the participants’ responses, and only after the participants felt satisfied with their responses, including responses to follow-up questions, were they considered complete and subsequently coded. In this way, participants were always aware of the data they were producing, and able to check that it adequately represented their views.

**Summary of the Findings**

The findings indicate that the imported teacher-education model has had significant effects on the personal and professional lives of the transformed teachers. Not only do transformed teachers experience inter and intrapersonal conflict as a result of their transformed beliefs, they also find great satisfaction and personal efficacy. Each of the major themes to emerge from the data relating to each research question will be explored below.

**Table 3**

*Major Themes for Research Question 1: “What is the experience of in-service teachers enrolled in a progressive teacher-education MA program in Japan working in a traditional environment?”*

- Buy-in to the “TC Way”
- Changing perspectives of themselves and their work
- Increased confidence in themselves and their decisions
Buy-in to the “TC Way.” The teachers all clearly expressed feelings of gratitude for their TC education, and an affinity with the progressive principles contained therein. They chose the program because there was nothing else in Japan that provided what they wanted. For Asako and Vera, this was a drastic change from the traditional educational approaches they grew to loath, and for Sasaki, it was a chance to simulate a “study-abroad” experience that could simultaneously expose her to progressive teaching practices while giving her the language practice she felt she needed to improve her proficiency, and thus be respected by her colleagues and students. While these were the reasons for choosing TC, it was the education they received that resulted in their eventual allegiance to school’s approach to education. All three referred to progressive, student-centered pedagogy as they described their experiences. Their mentioning of approaches such as “cooperative-learning,” “task-based learning,” and “communicative language teaching” identify the “TC Way,” and show that these teachers believed in it. These approaches are in stark contrast to the traditional approaches prevalent in Japanese secondary schools, in particular the *yakudoku* approach (translation-reading) that Sasaki disparaged, and the over-reliance on the teaching of grammatical accuracy. TC showed them that what they suspected about Japanese education was right, and that there are better, more pedagogically current approaches to second language acquisition.

For Sasaki, being in an American college setting reduced her anxiety markedly, despite her reservations about her own English-language abilities. TC’s emphasis on discussion of ideas and collaboration, rather than competitiveness and criticism, allowed her to thrive in the program, and internalize the humanistic approach TC represented. Asako and Vera praised the practicality of the program, which appealed to their desire to apply what they were learning right
away, while knowing that what they were doing was “pedagogically sound.” TC provided them with the theory, and the practical skills to improve their teaching, and they were grateful for that.

**Changing perspectives of themselves and their work.** Teachers in the TC Tokyo program would not truly achieve ‘buy-in’ with the “TC Way” unless they felt it had was having an impact on their belief systems. While there have been a great many teachers to go through the program, not all have been affected enough by what they learned to actually change their approach to language education. The three participants in this study clearly did have a transformational experience in the program, which led to changes in how they viewed themselves as educators, as well as what they believed is possible in their own contexts. For example, Sasaki found that what she understood about the profession was based on fear of failure and the belief that pedagogy should be based on grammar translation. She no longer felt she had a lack of knowledge or needed to hide her linguistic deficiencies. She discovered that she could work within the traditional system, and adjust how she perceived the institutional focus on testing to be more meaningful to her students.

Asako and Vera completely changed their view of control in the classroom, believing that a student-centered approach would lead to better learning outcomes. Asako found that easing control in the classroom could lead to the pedagogical goals she was seeking. Likewise, Vera discovered that she had to give up control of what the students were learning in her classes, and accept the fact that often what teachers think they are teaching is not necessarily what students are taking away—and that that is not necessarily a bad thing.

An important aspect of pursuing an MA degree in education is that it allows entry into an academic community. It is evidence that one is committed to the profession and signals to others this commitment. The participants in this study began to see themselves differently as they
identified as professional educators. This change in their self-view was associated with their exposure to the vocabulary of their field, second language acquisition. Repeatedly they described their views and perspectives using the terminology they were experiencing in the program, “marking” themselves as professional experts, rather than the novices they were at the start of the program. Vera perhaps summarized this feeling most succinctly when she wrote:

I can’t really sum up my TC experience in one word. I have been thinking about it for a few days now, but I think more than anything TC helped me find a place in the academic community and introduced me to a group of like-minded individuals who were there to become better educators and researchers. It provided me with a place where I was comfortable yet challenged to become a better educator.

**Increased confidence in themselves and their decisions.** As students in an MA TESOL program begin to identify themselves as validated participants of an academic community, there is concomitant confidence associated with that mental shift in identity. They move from “teachers” to “educators” and assume the posture of the psychologically heightened position. Like Asako and Vera, Sasaki also changed her view of control, but in her case it was more about taking control of her destiny as a non-native English-speaking teacher, and understanding that linguistic perfection is not the proper measure by which to evaluate teachers. By no longer feeling that she had to hide anything, she experienced an incredible sense of freedom to shift her focus from trying to perfect her English, to the generation of ideas and the perfection of her craft. Because of the program, she was able to trust her own abilities and pedagogical decisions, which led to confidence in herself as a qualified educator and ratified member of her professional community.
The “empowerment” that Asako felt as a result of the program translated into confidence in herself in the classroom, and was reflected in her teaching. Colleagues began to take notice of her and request that she share her knowledge with them. This recognition encouraged her as it positioned her in her workplace as an “expert.” The fact that Asako ultimately chose to leave secondary-school teaching full time and move into university teaching shows that she had confidence to change her destiny. It is rare for secondary school teachers to attempt the jump to higher education, particularly in Japan, but Asako realized she had more to offer, and had, thanks to her teacher education, the confidence to initiate a substantial, and risky, change in her career. Vera’s confidence was manifest in her belief that students should be more active in their education, and her efforts, while often controversial, led her to initiate practices that accomplished this end. She had the confidence in herself as “a good teacher” to positively impact her students’ lives, let alone teach them English.

**Research Question Two**

Transforming the beliefs of the participants is the goal of any teacher education program, and in this regard TC was no different. However, this exposure to progressive philosophy and pedagogy produces risks to local teachers in a context unfamiliar with the concepts. Even in John Dewey’s United States, progressive approaches have repeatedly succumbed to the traditional teacher-centered model, as schools and municipal boards of education feel pressure to produce better test-takers. And while teachers in the US having been transformed by progressive teacher education experience the same conflicts that teachers in this study did, the key difference is that the progressive approach is actually quite common in second language education in the US. Perhaps more than any other subject area, English as a Second Language (ESL) has not only accepted the progressive approach, it has quietly been doing so for nearly 30 years. In
Japan, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), and this is key, it is one of the subject areas on college entrance examinations, like mathematics and physics. This positioning of the subject as a target for test-taking has led the teaching pedagogy to succumb to approaches that emphasize efficient skills for translation and memorization (Widdowson, 2003). Such passive approaches do not lead to language acquisition, and have been discredited in the SLA research since the mid 1970’s.

The three teachers in this study were transformed by their education, and left the program with the confidence to effect change. Attempting change, as in any professional context, assumes a certain amount of risk to the agents of change. The interview questions related to the second research question were designed to directly examine the effects of a progressive teacher-education program on transformed Japanese teachers working in traditional settings, and the challenges they faced. And the thematic analysis resulted in the three themes as presented below in Table 4 and discussed following the table.
Table 4

Major Themes for Research Question 2: “What are the factors, cognitive and sociocultural, that influence the extent to which teachers feel the progressive principles acquired through their education can be adapted and applied in their traditional context?”

- Institutional Limitations
- Interpersonal Pressures
- Having an Impact

Dealing with institutional limitations. Teachers are often pressed for time. There are curricular and institutional restraints placed on their work which limits their ability to teach how and what they want. In Japan, this is a particularly nefarious problem, as much of the secondary school education students receive is designed to prepare them for high-stakes college entrance examinations. The participants in this study have the added stress of discovering that what they believe to be effective second language teaching is in direct contrast to these institutional aims. All three lamented the prominence of testing at their institutions, and in relation to their own domains, the fronting of translation and grammar training. Sasaki discovered that she could no longer accept the Ministry of Education-approved textbooks blindly as she did before. Her education gave her a critical eye toward the effectiveness of these materials, and caused her discomfort knowing that they were all lacking in significant ways. She strained under the pressure to prepare students for university exams at the expense of providing communicative language teaching and student-centered lessons. Similarly, Asako felt at a “complete loss” as she navigated the prescribed curriculum and had difficulty finding any value in it at all. She found
the amount of testing absurd, and questioned how students can engage in social learning when their desks and chairs were firmly attached to the floor. She began to lose herself in the structure, and in particular, she began to believe that her prescribed role was to be “Japanese,” and thus focus on grammar and translation.

Vera was at the opposite curricular spectrum to Asako, though equally as lost: where Asako found herself a “Japanese” cog in the system, Vera was the “native English speaker.” Vera could separate herself from a curricular structure that prioritized memorization skills and eschewed critical thinking, however she could not help wondering if her participation in the school was merely to give the impression of internationalization. She thought that her contributions to the education of the students was somehow less valuable, as the clear priority was on the students’ “other” English classes—the ones taught in Japanese and focusing on test-taking. In all three cases, the participants ascribed their discomfort with the prominent curricular structure at their institutions with the education they received, which promulgated a completely different approach to second language acquisition.

**Interpersonal pressures that weighed on teachers.** Finding themselves at odds with the institutional mandates led the three to come into conflict with stakeholders at their schools with allegiance to the traditional system. With such an emphasis on college entrance examinations, it is little wonder that Sasaki found her students also wanting to focus on test-taking. If the goal of a high school education is to prepare one for college entrance examinations, it is in the students’ best interest to desire teaching that is conducive to this end. This “culture” of test taking among teachers, and even students, caused Sasaki great discomfort, particularly when she found a small group of like-minded teachers at her school, yet who were loath to join her in pressing for change. At that point, Sasaki realized what she was up against,
and concluded that Japanese education is lost unless there are more teachers willing to take up the fight.

In Japan, seniority is prized, and older teachers are given much respect, at least outwardly. Asako found her ideas denigrated by seniors at her school who were uninterested in change, and who had the influence to maintain the status quo. Young, energetic and creative teachers pose a threat to the system, and Asako was marginalized and pressured to keep her ideas to herself. The more she learned about progressive approaches, the more she “suffered” inside as she watched the traditional curriculum continue to hold sway. She tried to move to other secondary schools, but found the same resistance to change, and even outright hostility. This hostility to change eventually led her to leave secondary teaching altogether in search of more accepting colleagues and an openness to new ideas.

Vera’s position as a native English-speaking teacher put her at odds with both Japanese and non-Japanese alike. While she never felt pressure to conform to the traditional style of teaching, her student-centered approach was largely dismissed and ignored by the Japanese teachers. The fact that colleagues viewed her value to be primarily that she spoke English, led her to realize that there was a “two-tier” professional system at her school: the one that mattered, occupied by Japanese who taught test-preparation, and the one that did not, occupied by “foreigners” who provided students with “conversation.” If this were not enough of a strain on her personal efficacy, the other non-Japanese teachers took issue with her ideas as well, ironically, arguing for more teacher control in the classroom.

**Despite the hardships, teachers feel they are having an impact.** Being a transformed teacher carries with it a responsibility to integrate one’s beliefs into practice, despite the resistance and conflict one experiences. Perhaps more than any other artifact of being
transformed, this desire to do “good work” illustrates the transformed teacher’s commitment to their changed perspective. Naturally, when the cultural and curricular establishment is resistant, or even ambivalent to progressive ideas, teachers will need to find creative ways to implement their beliefs in order to feel they are having an impact. While this marks the teachers as subversive, and serves to alienate them from others in their profession, there is no alternative when they are truly transformed and believe that what they are doing is right.

Sasaki found a way to “embed” progressive teaching into her traditional lessons. Her new-found confidence allowed her to look critically at the traditional curriculum, and find ways to supplement it. This compromise allowed her to outwardly maintain the status quo, while having the positive impact she waned to on her students’ learning. Most importantly for Sasaki, and for progressive teaching in general, is the fact that she was chosen to bring more student-centered, communicative learning to the Ministry of Education-prescribed curriculum. Even while the actual classrooms maintain the traditional test-taking focus, the Ministry has realized that this approach does not lead to language acquisition. While the attempt by Sasaki’s principal to have her apply for the position was perhaps a way to remove her and her ideas from his school, ultimately she is poised to have a much greater impact on Japanese secondary language education than he, or even she, could have realized.

Asako came away from her secondary school experience frustrated and lost, yet in their asking her back to give special classes and teacher-training, she ultimately realized that her ideas were in fact having an impact. Like Sasaki will do through the Ministry, Asako was affecting change in student learning through direct contact with teachers. This is not unlike how she was transformed herself, in a progressive teacher-training program. By enlightening other teachers to
the merits of student-centered learning, she may very well find herself responsible for initiating transformative learning experiences in other teachers.

Vera’s impact was more quantifiable: she showed that her approach resulted in students being better prepared for university entrance examinations. While she had to “fight tooth and nail” to implement her writing curriculum, and this resulted in strained relationships with colleagues, they could no longer criticize her ideas as irrelevant to the larger aims of the high school—getting students accepted to universities. She could point to direct evidence that a more humanistic approach to writing and assessment was at least as effective as teaching translation and test-taking skills.

Having a sense that what one is doing in the classroom is in-line with their belief-systems is critically important to teachers. For all three, aligning themselves with progressive education while working in traditional contexts posed great risks to their social and cognitive well-being. And while implementing those progressive principles resulted in interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict, ultimately they were able to negotiate their beliefs within the rigid system in which they found themselves working. The two research questions posed in this study were sufficient to ascertain the effect a progressive teacher education program had on transformed participants, as well as illuminate the impact it had on their actual practice within the traditional system.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Transformative Learning Theory was used as a lens through which to explore and interpret the experiences of the teachers in this study. It proved especially appropriate considering the origins of the theory, and the subject under investigation.

**Transformative learning theory.** The three participants in this study exhibited traits consistent with having undergone a transformative learning experience. As Dewey stated, in
order for experiences to be educative, they must be based in critical reflection and “lead out into an expanding world of subject matter” (Dewey, 1938, p. 87). The ability of these three teachers to reflect upon their experiences as TC students, as well as how that education impacts their daily practice, is evidence of their belief in the importance of reflection. The participants were already well versed in the reflection process, as it is an integral part of Teachers College Columbia’s overarching philosophy of teacher education. Jack Mezirow (2003), echoing Dewey’s emphasis on sustained, democratic communication through critical reflection, describes the role of the adult educator in transcendent terms:

Creating the conditions for and the skills of effective adult reasoning and the disposition for transformative learning—including critical reflection and dialectical discourse—is the essence of adult education and defines the role of the adult educator, both as a facilitator of reasoning in a learning situation and a cultural activist fostering the social, economic, and political conditions required for fuller, freer participation in critical reflection and discourse by all adults in a democratic society. (p. 63)

While it is certainly the goal of Teachers College Columbia to foster transformative educative experiences along the lines Dewey and Mezirow describe, there is no guarantee that such experiences will happen among its students. However, the reflections of participants in this study can be interpreted according to Wilson and Parrish’s (2010) model in order to ascertain the extent of their transformation. The three stages of the Wilson and Parrish model are personal meaning, competence with the subject and relationships.

Personal meaning for the participants was evidenced by the referential, even mythological way in which they resonated with their TC education. Asako and Vera described their experiences in life-changing terms. Asako, for example, referred to her TC education,
fittingly, as “transformative” in that it “transformed, and reformed, my teaching beliefs.” Vera described TC as “a place where I was comfortable yet challenged to become a better educator.” Likewise, Sasaki began to “change” her “perspective” of education and develop a sense of her own value as an educator. In all three cases, clear mention was made to how they owed their pedagogical belief-systems to their TC education. They became the personification of “TCers” by identifying themselves with the program and the methods it espoused.

Participants showed increased *competence with the subject* in the way they described their profession. The specialist terminology they used, such as *pragmatics* or *cooperative learning* marked them as experts in the field, evidence of their increased competence moving from novice to expert. As part of showing competence in the subject, participants also underwent new generative stances, that is, they experienced a shift in their belief systems. According to Wilson and Parrish, a new generative stance toward a subject or domain “leads to new understandings, commitments, problem solving possibilities and continued growth in the role or subject matter” (Wilson & Parrish, 2011, p. 3). The participants in this study made numerous references to their changing perspectives as a result of their TC education. Sasaki, for example, referred to many changes in her teaching perspective, but perhaps the most profound underscored the cultural difference between traditional and progressive education: “The notion of ‘learner-centered’ changed my view of teaching.” Another important aspect of having competence in the subject, according to Wilson and Parrish, is increased feelings of efficacy and empowerment. The findings in this study are consistent with this notion, as participants made several references to how their TC education gave them confidence to effect real change in their workplaces, despite the institutional and interpersonal restrictions placed upon them.
The third indicator of transformative learning experience according to Wilson and Parrish is related to enhanced professional *relationships*. Learners develop and foster “reciprocally rewarding relationships with teachers/leaders, learners, or workers within a community of practice” (p. 4), and through these relationships, find inspiration and motivation to further explore their transformed knowledge. The participants in this study each made reference to feeling “at home” in the TC community, and they valued the relationships with their fellow students and professors. As Vera stated, “more than anything, TC helped me find a place in the academic community and introduced me to a group of like-minded individuals.” Also important to the *relationships* indicator is what Wilson and Parrish refer to as a “call to action,” which is a “moral imperative” to engage others in an effort to make the world a better place. The fact that the participants in this study all felt they were having a positive impact on their students and profession, illustrates their willingness to act upon their transformed knowledge. Asako eventually left second language teaching in order to pursue a career in higher education, only to return when she felt she could have an impact on the lives of her fellow teachers. Vera had to “fight tooth and nail” in order to have her vision realized because she knew it was the best course for her students, while Saki took up the call to join the Ministry of Education and work toward improving English education nation-wide.

The participants’ “call to action,” that is to actively work to bring change to their own teaching as well as larger profession, resulted from intense, “critical reflection on the assumptions upon which interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based (Mezirow, 2002, p. 7). Self-reflection is a critical part of the “TC Way” and is integrated throughout the MA program because of the institutional belief that “self-reflection can lead to
significant personal transformations” (p. 7). The narrative inquiry of this study acted as a continuation of this reflective process so crucial to transformative learning.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

The findings align closely with the literature presented in Chapter 2 and the three guiding questions posed, designed to provide the critical context for the experiences of the participants in this study:

1. What are the origins of the intervening Western progressive model?
2. What are the pedagogical features of second language learning in the TC MA program?
3. What are the pedagogical features of second language learning in the traditional Confucian curriculum?

The origins of the progressive model. In order to contextualize the approach of the TC MA program, and the participants reaction to it, it was necessary to present literature describing the origins of the progressive model. The participants in describing their experience in the program, as well as the effects it was having on their practice, parallels were drawn to progressive philosophy. Dewey believed that the traditional approach was responsible for erasing the souls of children, and subjecting them to an unnatural social order. Dewey believed that learning should be cooperative and that teachers should move away from being bosses or dictators. The teacher’s role is to gradually relinquish control of the learning process, and for them to be guides to knowledge, rather than providers of it. Vera and Asako made this process of giving up control a central part of their teaching approach, and they relished in the discovery that giving up control was actually leading to more learning. Sasaki realized that by no longer fearing losing control of her classroom, she could focus on ways to better engage her students.
Dewey’s philosophy could be seen in the pedagogical orientation of the MA program, and its progressive approach to second language acquisition.

**TC’s approach to second language acquisition.** Considering John Dewey’s long tenure at Teachers College, Columbia, it is not surprising to find the school’s approach to be in-line with the progressive principles he championed. All three participants made specific reference to pedagogical features of the progressive model, such as placing an emphasis on task-based learning and fostering a cooperative, student-centered environment. The curriculum at TC emphasized these progressive ideas as they related to second language acquisition, a field of study that did not exist in Dewey’s day, yet has adapted to progressive principles due to the current belief in the field that language acquisition is a direct byproduct of social interaction and cooperation in the construction of meaning. The concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is perhaps the greatest realization of Dewey’s ideas because unlike other subject areas that have struggled with the implementation of his philosophy, CLT is in practice around the world because there is ample, and growing, empirical evidence indicating that it is the superior method for teaching and learning a foreign or second language. The participants in this study were exposed to this research, and came to believe in CLT, which led to conflict between the progressive ideas they believed in, and the traditional approaches they were expected to adopt in their traditional contexts.

**Pedagogical features of second language learning in the traditional Confucian curriculum.** When something that is inherently social and dependent on cooperation, such as language, becomes a subject of formal study, conflicting approaches emerge to teaching it. The immediate needs of performing well on high-stakes tests can easily take precedence over actual ability to communicate in the language. This has long been the conundrum in the traditional
Confucian curriculum, as the approach to SLA has been mainly been tightly associated with test-taking. This approach is not inherently wrong or bad, but merely a function of necessity. Problems manifest only when there exists a competing approach, and the research in CLT related to its effectiveness has rendered the traditional approach difficult to justify. The Japanese Ministry of Education has been encouraging the implementation of CLT for decades, resulting in little change to the traditional system. However, with the introduction of the imported teacher-education program TC provides, there are now Japanese educators not only versed in the theory behind CLT, but eager to implement it.

**Limitations**

While this study has been executed successfully and with great care, there are some limitations that must be noted. The small sample size and narrow demographic of the participants, namely secondary school teachers in Japan, naturally limit its generalizability. However, the goal of narrative research is to “render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), and for the readers research to find their own verisimilitude with the findings—a sense that they ring true with their own experience (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000). Just as narrative inquiry is rooted in reflection, the reader is also part of this reflexivity, as the stories told can illuminate and underscore their own critical events, and this process is unique and meaningful to the individual, regardless of how many participants were in the study, or its exact context.

An additional limitation is that the researcher was an instructor in, and proponent of, the progressive Teachers College Columbia University teacher-education program that transformed the participants. In addition, he taught many years in the Japanese public school system as a “foreign instructor,” and had very similar experiences to one of the participants in this study,
Vera. While this may appear to compromise his objective judgment in the collection and interpretation of the data, or the generalizability of the findings, Bannister (1981) reminds us that the “doctrine of reflexivity” (p. 199) allows for researchers to draw on their own interests and personal experiences when choosing research topics to explore, and this personal connection to the subjects and subject matter adds to the richness of the narrative. The purpose of this study was to explore the shared experiences of the participants, and to shed light on their struggles and accomplishments. While no study is ever without limitations, this study has accomplished these goals.

**Further Studies**

Though this study focused only on three participants, there are nearly 600 graduates of the TC Tokyo program, and it would be worthwhile surveying their experiences in order to uncover other such stories of professional and interpersonal conflict and negotiation. There is one other US university providing teacher education in Japan, Temple University, with a similar number of graduates. With the growing number of teachers educated in a foreign model, further research aimed at understanding teacher experiences should be welcomed. Integrating quantitative measures, such as through questionnaires and employment data could also enhance the understanding of teachers’ experiences following their education.

**Significance of the Study**

This study sheds light on the transnational education movement that has been intensifying over the past three decades, focusing on teacher education following an American, progressive approach. As western models of teacher education are imported into East Asia, the effects of these “intervening” models on the local context, with different cultural traditions and expectations of education, it is important to be sensitive to how consumers of this education are
affected. Indigenous teachers experiencing “buy in” with the foreign model may experience conflict between the two systems – which can significantly complicate how teachers conceptualize and engage in their practice as well as how they formulate conceptions of self in a community of practice.

Through telling their own stories and reflecting on their experiences following their transformation, the teachers in this study experienced interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict, which may have been an unintended consequence of their transnational education. It is never the intention of a university to create conflict and distress in the lives of its students, yet that is exactly what happened to these teachers. These results indicate that more sensitivity may be needed in understanding the local context before a program is brought to an area of the world that may not be accustomed to the philosophy contained within it. As this is particularly true of teacher education programs, the same can be said of liberal arts universities, such as Yale and NYU, that are rushing to open campuses in East Asia and the middle east, where the political and educational landscape is radically different from what is central to the liberal arts: freedom of expression, an academic culture of questioning, and emphasis on critical thinking and argumentation. It is imperative to take into consideration the prevailing cultural orientation to education, as well as consider the effects on students who are transformed by the foreign model and have no choice but to live and work within the local culture.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to explore the effect of transnational teacher education on indigenous teachers working within a system unlike that of their teacher education program. The research questions which guided the in-depth interviews, and led to the narrative inquiry, provided the opportunity for teachers to identify and reflect on the “critical events” that shaped
their approach to teaching, and their views of themselves as effective teachers. With the increase in transnational education, particularly from the US to Asia, it is important to consider how the often very different educational philosophies and approaches may impact the consumers of that education. Teacher education is particularly sensitive because the teachers are often expected to deliver a culturally sanctioned form of education that can be at odds with the imported model. Teachers who choose to adopt the more progressive approach can be criticized, isolated and sanctioned by the stakeholders in the dominant, local model. For educational institutions looking to spread their education to other parts of the world, research looking at this area of education is particularly important.

The participants in this particular study did manage to navigate between the two philosophies, the traditional and progressive, and while they did report affecting change in their traditional contexts, though limited, in the end they succumbed to the daunting challenges they faced. In all three cases, the teachers ultimately abandoned secondary-school teaching, and the inherent frustrations they experienced there, and took positions where they felt they could be more effective educators. For Sasaki, this meant joining the Ministry of Education, where she could mentor new teachers and help develop curricular policy that was in-line with her pedagogical beliefs. For Asako and Vera, this meant moving to university teaching where they could experience more autonomy to develop courses and content they believed in, and where they were not under pressure to conform to a traditional model of education. It is impossible to predict if their careers would have followed similar trajectories had they not been transformed by their MA teacher-education program, but it is reasonable to assume that they would have remained in the traditional system, unaware of the more progressive approaches.
In all three cases, the teachers reported feeling relieved to leave secondary-school teaching, finally free to be the teachers they wanted to be. In this way, it can be said that the transformation of the teachers was for their own personal and professional betterment, despite the hardships they endured in the short term.

**Personal Reflection**

As a graduate of Teachers College Columbia University, where the legacy of John Dewey is integrated into the philosophy of the school (and where his name is etched into the façade on 121st Street), it seems a travesty that I was not exposed to his writings in any detail until my doctoral coursework at Northeastern. Starting with Democracy and Education, I was soon drawn to his other writings. In the course of writing this thesis, I have consumed nearly everything he has ever written on education. As I took courses in transnational and comparative education, I started to view the material through two lenses: Dewey’s philosophy, and my own teaching experience of over 15 years in Japan. I naturally wanted to do research that combined the two, and as a graduate of, and now instructor in the Teachers College Columbia branch campus in Tokyo, I was uniquely situated to achieve this. This research project is the first to my knowledge looking specifically at the impact TC Tokyo has had on the lives of its graduates and, with the recent announcement that the campus will be closed, it may be remain the only one.

My experience in Japan was similar to Vera’s in that I came here initially as and ALT, assistant language teacher, where my role was mainly to assist the Japanese teacher of English. This largely consisted of reading sentences for students to repeat, and to engage in simple dialogues with the main teacher. I visited most classes once a month, while working at two junior high schools. I did this for four years, and it was simple work, but I came to Japan with modest ESL teaching experience at a junior college in California, and thought that teaching in
Japan would be more fulfilling. That is, I thought I would actually be teaching. I grew tired of being the “human tape-recorder” and applied to be a main teacher at a progressive public high school. I say “progressive” because it was virtually unheard of for a foreigner to become a full (i.e. not merely an assistant) teacher in a Japanese public school. I longed to be given the responsibility to be a teacher in my own right. I was given the job and stayed there for five years, honing my teaching while at the same time pursuing my MA degree at TC Tokyo.

As a high school teacher I was finally in control of my classes, curriculum and even assessment. I was given complete freedom to experiment and try the new ideas I was learning at TC. I was lucky in that I did not have to “fight tooth and nail” to get my ideas implemented, as Vera did, and the job was incredibly rewarding. But I could not help feeling that I was somehow separated from the Japanese English teachers, as their experience was very much in line with the Japanese participants in this study in that they had to conform to a rigid curriculum that left them little time to teach anything other than test preparation and grammar. I felt slightly guilty knowing that I had all the freedom, and that it was because I was the school foreigner brought in to give students the “communicative” experience. There were times I would try to coordinate activities with the Japanese English teachers, in the interest of better integrating the courses and content across the curriculum, but there was little middle ground. There was no flexibility on their side.

But this was not to say that they were unhappy or unfulfilled teaching the way they had to. They were aware of my style, and sometimes expressed envy at my being able to provide “fun” lessons devoid of endless grammar drills and dictation exercises, but when I offered advice on how they can make even grammar classes fun and communicative (applying what I learned at TC), they did not seem interested in trying anything new. Many of my Japanese classmates at
TC expressed similar teaching situations, and I often heard things like, “These are great ideas, and I wish I could apply them to my teaching, but I can’t. I teach in a very traditional school and we have to focus on grammar and tests.” This started me wondering what impact TC was having on Japanese teachers, if any, because I could see some teachers really making an effort to change their teaching, even a little, based on their transformation at TC.

After completing my MA at TC Tokyo, I felt myself transformed as well, and decided to continue studying at TC in New York. I believed I had much more to learn, and I was completely convinced in the TC progressive model. After three years in New York, and another TC degree (this time a Master of Education in Applied Linguistics), I returned to Japan to teach full time at a university, and adjunct in the TC Tokyo program that transformed my teaching in the first place. It was not long after that I started the Northeastern Doctor of Education program, and was properly introduced to John Dewey.

As a teacher in the TC Tokyo program, I made it a point to highlight Dewey and assign readings that helped to make explicit where progressive second language pedagogy came from. One of my assignments in the teaching practicum, one of the first courses students took in the program, was to have them write their own “philosophy of education” based on what they believed was right and what informed their own practice. In later courses, I returned to the philosophy of education assignment, and had them continue to develop it based on what they were learning in the program. This became the centerpiece of their portfolios, and the longitudinal nature of the assignment allowed students to see their transformation, and it provided me with a written record to identify students who truly had a transformative educative experience, as well as those who did not. In their reflective writing, I began to see their struggles
with their new knowledge, and how they attempted to navigate in their traditional teaching contexts, which was something I, as a non-Japanese, was lucky never to have to experience.

TC Tokyo was supposed to usher in a major shift in language teaching in Japan—to bring it out of the dark ages of grammar translation and rote memorization. This narrative research project allowed me to explore the impact the school has had, and I feel the findings shed light on what TC Tokyo’s legacy will be after it closes, having educated over 600 teachers in Japan over 25 years. I do not think TC Tokyo accomplished its grand mission to fundamentally alter second language teaching in Japan on a large scale. However, as this narrative inquiry has shown, there was certainly limited success at the individual level. The Ministry of Education may finally accomplish what TC was unable to do with the new guidelines that require a tectonic shift away from the traditional approach to the progressive approach TC was espousing for a quarter century. Further research should look at the impact the guidelines have on the daily practices of teachers around the country.
References


Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

• Describe your teaching context. To what extent does it represent the traditional education model?

• Contrast it with what you perceive as the pedagogical approach espoused in the TC MA program.

• What do you see as the fundamental differences between the TC approach and the traditional approach?

• How do you define "success" as a teacher?

• Finish this sentence: "When my students (can) XYZ, I feel I have done my job."

TC PROGRAM QUESTIONS

• Why did you enter the TC program rather than a traditional Japanese one?

• What were your aspirations coming into the program?

• What were you hoping for?

• Did the program address those aspirations? If so, what aspects of the programs were most effective? If not, what did you not find that you were looking for?

• What has your experience in the program been?

• As a result of your time in the program, do you view effective teaching differently than you did before? If so, in what ways and what aspects of the program contributed to your different understanding?

• Do you see yourself differently as a result of the program?

CONTEXT QUESTIONS

• Do you feel you are the best teacher you can be? Why or why not?
• How has what you have learned in the program affected your practice?

• What difficulties have you experienced in applying progressive principles in your particular teaching environment?

• How do you negotiate between what you learned in the program and the realities in your teaching context?

• What most influences your performance: the context or your interaction with the context? Or is it something else? If so, what is it?

• To what extent has what you learned at TC limited or freed you in your teaching?

• Does your context make you feel more or less effective as a teacher? Please explain your answer.

• How does that relate to your ability to implement pedagogical principles you have learned in the program?

• Are there restraints on your autonomy to implement progressive pedagogy? If so, what are these restraints?

• Does what you have learned in the TC program make you feel more or less effective as a teacher? Please explain your answer.

• Does practicing progressive pedagogy enhance your feelings of self-worth as a teacher? Please explain your answer.