Negotiating Academic Practices, Identities, and Relationships in a Doctoral Program: A Case from an Overseas Institution in Japan

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Abstract

This narrative report is part of a larger ethnographic case study of a doctoral cohort at an overseas U.S. institution in Japan. The oral and written data collected over a seven-year period bring to the fore the constraints and opportunities that graduate students encountered in educational and research contexts located on the periphery of inner circle countries. While the English language in all of its myriad socio-educational manifestations holds a prestigious spot worldwide, local EFL scholars and practitioners still face obstacles in their attempts to establish themselves in Western-based publishing and conferencing circles. Similarly, foreign academics in Japan may also find themselves at a disadvantage in trying to establish or maintain connections to a larger international academic network. Nevertheless, the cohort members in this study managed to create various networking opportunities that fostered their apprenticeship to professional academic discourses and ultimately helped them secure viable positions in local and international forums in the fields of TESOL and SLA.

Introduction

In 1998, we began our doctoral studies [1] at Temple University Japan (TUJ), a branch campus of a U.S. institution of higher education. From that time onward, our apprenticeship into a larger sphere of academic discourses [2] developed in ways we never could have imagined. Our stories as developing bi/multilingual teacher/researchers highlight the socio-political situatedness of higher education and the inherent dilemmas encountered in negotiating identities in the field[3] , designing and publishing research studies, and becoming part of a professional academic community. We have borrowed the meaning of the term "situated" from Haraway (1988) to emphasize our report's departure from what we define as de-contextualized, experimentally-controlled studies based on what some think are neutral researcher observations. Our interpretations of participants' stories evolve from the notion that all research is carried out from a particular ideological standpoint and that "rather than being factored out or neutralized to arrive at universally generalizable findings, should instead be factored in in ways that make our findings locally and situationally valid" (Atkinson, 2005, p. 51).

In this article, which is part of a larger ethnographic case study, we examine how in addition to the normal challenges facing doctoral students in their apprenticeship to academia, we found, as we started our studies, that we had to deal with many additional constraints including a lack of institutional resources, the marginalization of qualitative research, full-time work responsibilities, and language and academic discourse barriers. We discuss how we negotiated these constraints and moved from being inexperienced outsiders to proficient insiders in a budding community of academics.

The narratives of our cohort members' social interactions with peers and advisors attest to the complex negotiations that shape how a scholar's identity is co-constructed and how one's theoretical and methodological research agenda is accorded legitimacy within and beyond a local community of practice. Our stories provide a window into the academic struggles of a group of individuals who merged into a community of practice that fostered opportunities for scholarly achievement in both local and international TESOL and SLA arenas.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, there are two theoretical lenses that we believe help reveal the practices, dynamics and narratives of the cohort of graduate students in this study. In looking at the embedded nature of a small group of students within a cohort who chose qualitative research paradigms for their dissertation projects, we apply Wenger's (1998) notion of a community of practice. In bringing the narratives of cohort members into the study, we draw on narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We will briefly touch on each of these below before turning to a description of this study's context.

Communities of Practice

The social theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) proves helpful in making sense of how we were socialized into academic discourses and how we became more adept at overcoming challenges in our doctoral program. CoP has been used to look at classrooms, schools, and gender (e.g., Eckert, 1989; Holmes, 1999; Toohey, 1999). CoP posits a community can develop when mutually engaged participants negotiate a joint enterprise as they develop a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). This concept fits the situation of doctoral students perfectly as they engage in a joint enterprise (doctoral studies) and develop a shared repertoire that includes classes, study groups, on-line communications, conference presentations, publications, and other activities. CoP also examines the process of identity transformation and suggests that in order to make sense of identity formation we should consider three distinct modes of belonging:

- Engagement-active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning;
- Imagination-creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience; and
- Alignment-coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises. (1998, pp. 173-174)

Thus, although mutual engagement, joint enterprises, and shared repertoires were part of our experiences at TUJ, they only pertain to the "practice" aspects of a community of practice. Wenger cautions that "issues of identity are an integral aspect of a social theory of learning and are thus inseparable from issues of practice, community, and meaning" (p. 145). In other words, a CoP is identity and practice interacting and working on each other at the same time.

Participation is another important concept in CoP theory. Wenger emphasized that by participating in a CoP one is at the same time helping to create it. Building upon legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), CoP posits that newcomers are socialized into a community's practices through their participation. In other words, they learn the ropes through watching old timers, observing the setting, and attempting to participate. Newcomers develop different trajectories (peripheral, inbound, insider, boundary) with some never becoming full insiders, while some go beyond mere participation and become leaders in both local and global contexts.

In this paper, we apply the CoP framework as it relates to our negotiation of academic practices and identities within and between three interrelated communities: the greater TESOL community, the TUJ community, and a group of qualitative researchers who became members of a community later named the "QBook" - the title also assigned to our Yahoo group site. While on one level, we were being socialized into the academic practices of the TUJ community and the prevailing discourses of the TESOL community, on another level, faced with institutional constraints and embracing research

epistemologies constructivist/postmodern [4] and qualitative methodologies that we came to feel were not endorsed by the graduate program, we developed a peripheral CoP to support our communal interest in qualitative inquiry and its underlying values. The next sections will open the window even wider to display the doctoral experiences of the cohort members and how constraints morphed into unexpected opportunities.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry in the educational field has been recognized as a viable way of exploring the processes involved in the identity construction of educators, and most notable in this area are reports by Connelly and Clandinin (1987, 1995). TESOL researchers have illustrated narrative inquiry's potential to unravel the complexities of L2 learning (e.g., Bell, 2002; Kanno, 2000; Pavlenko, 1998) and how TESOL practitioners construct their identities as ESL/EFL teachers (e.g., Casanave & Schecter, 1997; Terryson & Golombek, 2002; Simon-Maeda, 2004). However, there seem to be no reports published using narrative inquiry that focus specifically on the experiences of doctoral students enrolled in a TESOL program in overseas institutions. We have employed narratives in this paper, as it is our belief that they offer a more nuanced understanding of participants' (on-line, workshop, informal) stories of their doctoral contexts that are connected to broader institutional and sociocultural contexts. Narrative theorists argue that "it is in narrative tellings that we construct identities: selves are made coherent and meaningful through the narrative or 'biographical' work that they do" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 42). Therefore, how academic identities were co-constructed through participation in a community of practice will be illustrated through an interpretive analysis of participants' verbatim accounts that constitute the bulk of our data spanning a seven-year period of doctoral studies.

Research Questions

The following research question guided our investigation concerning the ways that one group within a larger cohort of doctoral students developed individually and as a group within different communities of practice: the greater TESOL community, the TUJ community, and our QBook community:

In what ways is group of students attending a graduate institution on the periphery apprenticed into the academic practices and discourses of TESOL/SLA? What communities of practice are instrumental to this apprenticeship?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were eight individuals from two overlapping cohorts in

the TUJ Doctoral program. The eight participants were all full-time working professionals, mainly as university professors, in addition to being enrolled in the doctoral program. There were five native speakers of English (three male and two female) and three non-native speakers (one male and two females). The native speakers of English were long-term residents of Japan. Prior to entering the program, seven of the eight participants received their master's degrees from American-based institutions (e.g., Columbia Teacher's College, Temple University Japan, the School for International Training). All the members eventually elected to conduct their doctoral research using qualitative methods.

Their dissertation topics included a needs assessment within three Japanese corporations, a critical ethnography of a foreign labor union, a critical investigation of gender issues at a junior college, a study on learning opportunities in a study abroad program, and studies on the identity and development of Chinese students in Tokyo, females in a junior college, and young women in a teacher education program. It is their shared interest in qualitative research approaches and related theoretical frameworks that brought the eight participants together into a community of practice and led to many of the shared practices that are reported here. Many participants' names used in reporting the data below are pseudonyms; not all persons referred to below (including the authors) elected to be depicted anonymously. At the same time, we had participants conduct a member check by reading a draft of this article to provide feedback on our interpretations of the data.

Context

In this section we describe the institutional context wherein our doctoral experiences were situated. We felt the TUJ program presented a distinctive set of constraints and opportunities as we moved along the path from novice to experienced academics. TUJ offers a wide range of programs both in its undergraduate and graduate programs in business, education, and law. TUJ holds the distinction of being the "oldest and largest American university in Japan" and "the first educational institution in Japan to be officially recognized as a foreign university" with a Japan campus [5] by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (About Japan Campus, 2005). The doctor of education program, which we attended, was formed in Tokyo in 1988 and expanded to Osaka in 1995. To date, 78 doctoral degrees have been awarded. The doctorate program offers an Ed.D. in Curriculum, Instruction and Technology in Education with a specialization in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

Successful candidates must complete 48 semester hours of course work, pass a comprehensive examination, and write and defend a dissertation. The program's main focus is language acquisition research as it is related to TESOL. To achieve its curricular goals, the program draws upon visiting lecturers and luminaries in the field of second language acquisition (SLA)(For a listing of faculty see TUJ Graduate Faculty, 2005).

The program continues to be popular, as can be attested to by the large number of candidates (54) who entered the new cohorts that formed in Tokyo (the 8th cohort) and Osaka (the 5th cohort) in September, 2005. The program has a history of furthering professional opportunities of its graduates. However, based on our experiences, the program also has constraints that are perhaps inherent of many graduate programs operating on the periphery. These are examined in more detail below.

Procedures for Data Collection

Consistent with principles of qualitative research, the data for this study came from a variety of sources including correspondence from an electronic mailing list, notes from peer editing sessions that met approximately once a month from the summer of 2001 to the fall of 2003, and periodic workshops organized by the participants, and various documents (e.g., course descriptions, the TUJ homepage). Informed consent for use of the data in future research was confirmed by all participants. Data from the electronic mailing lists consisted of over 1,000 messages from the summer of 2000 to the late fall of 2004. Within this time frame, during the period of January 2000 to June 2003, this electronic list was used principally for the purposes of collecting participant narratives on conducting qualitative research. In the 392 messages posted during this period, the focus was on participant research experiences (e.g., researcher positionality, conceptual frameworks, data collection methods, data analysis, the writing process), but interwoven throughout the postings were comments on issues related to doing graduate work in the TUJ context. During this period, messages were qualitatively different from postings at other periods both in terms of length (averaging 3/4 of a page) and in terms of content. Messages outside the January to June time frame focused more on making and responding to inquiries, providing feedback on peer writing and scheduling appointments, whereas messages during this data collection period were first person accounts of participants' research experiences and responses by other participants to these accounts.

> In addition to these messages, a central data source was a data collection weekend held in June 2003. Building on the correspondence from January to June 2003, participants gathered for nine hours over the course of two days in Tokyo to discuss their experiences with the processes of conducting qualitative research in Japan and at TUJ. During this two-day session, an iterative process of discussion on predetermined topics (e.g., research methods, gaining access in the field, writing) in two concurrent focus groups followed by a sharing of summaries from each group was used to collectively build meaning. This is referred to below as "the Tokyo workshop." All discussion in the two focus groups and the follow-up summaries were tape-recorded and later transcribed leading to 14 hours of recorded data.

Analysis

After transcribing and importing the above data into a word processor, we read and coded the material according to established procedures for interpretive qualitative analysis (see, e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Huberman & Miles, 1994). Annotated codes (words or phrases) designated by the researchers were written in the margins of the transcripts next to data segments that were related to our research question. Recurring patterns were then grouped under 15 broad categories with multiple sub-topics under each category (see Appendix A for examples). This categorization procedure was carried out in an "iterative, inductive" style (Huberman & Miles, 1994, pp. 431-432) wherein the researchers were continually shuttling back and forth between the data, research question, examples within and across (participant) cases, our developing hypotheses, the study's theoretical framework, and conceptual links to broader institutional and societal factors that we felt were affecting the participants' accounts of their doctoral lives. This last point, in particular, is a defining characteristic of narrative inquiry wherein, after identifying commonalities within and across narratives, the researcher then makes an interpretive analysis of how participants' local stories are framed within macro contexts. In other words, our stories were profoundly shaped by evolving circumstances in our everyday lives as doctoral students, teachers, researchers, and family members.

For this report, we have chosen to describe only those major themes that we feel best represent how our group was apprenticed to membership within our community of practice through mutual engagement in different academic endeavors. The next section examines some of the constraints we faced. It draws upon representative data segments taken mainly from a collection of email exchanges and workshop discussions that were coded and analyzed following standard principles of interpretive qualitative research (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Stories of Constraints and Opportunities

The decision to enter the TUJ doctoral program is not undertaken lightly. It is an intensive and expensive program designed for working professionals. Accordingly, built upon the assumption that students will be working during the week, the class schedule requires candidates to give up their weekends for two and a half years. When we entered the program, some of the more salient institutional constraints were: limited course offerings, faculty availability issues, and limited physical resources (library, computer access, etc.). After being in the program for a while, we came to believe that what we term positivist research paradigms were privileged at the institution, and this constituted a significant constraint for us. Members of our cohort (of which QBook-the study participants--was part) also faced constraints on their time because of full-time teaching schedules, family obligations, and lengthy commutes to TUJ. In addition, many of the cohort members were facing the challenge of doing graduate work in their second language.

In the section below, we discuss first the constraints shared by all students attending

doctoral classes at TUJ with the belief that conditions such as these are shared by many doctoral candidates pursuing their degrees in institutions on the periphery. We then turn to the challenges that were specific to the participants in this study as they undertook studies and research paradigms that we believed were peripheral within their sponsoring institution. Following this discussion, we will then turn to the strategies employed by the participants to overcome these challenges and illustrate how these strategies were used to apprentice themselves into the practices of the wider TESOL community.

Geographical Periphery

TUJ is on the geographical periphery when compared to U.S. based institutions in relation to significant moments of engagement and alignment in the TESOL/SLA community (e.g., proximity to the annual TESOL, AAAL, and SLRF conferences). What this means to graduate students studying in peripheral institutions, yet trying to apprentice themselves to a specific western-based academic discourse, may be less apparent. The geographical distance means that a considerable investment in time and money is needed in order to participate in these conferences, where the most current research in the field is being discussed and presented. While a few students from TUJ may manage to make the trip, the majority of students miss out on these opportunities to rub shoulders with and be apprised of the most current research of fellow graduate students and established researchers alike. This has consequences not only in terms of access to current information, but also in terms of missed opportunities to be immersed in the discourse of the larger TESOL/SLA community of practice.

Limited Research Resources

Related to apprenticeship opportunities into the academic discourse of SLA research is the availability of references. At the time that we entered TUJ, access to materials both on the main campus in Philadelphia-and on the Tokyo campus (50,000 books and 800 periodicals) for cohort members studying in Osaka-was largely restricted to a process of interlibrary loan. With references not easily available, it was not uncommon to hear of native English speaking students returning to Japan from a vacation back home with suitcases full of articles copied from local university libraries. Those students working at Japanese universities would often rely on the limited resources available through these libraries, and during breaks between doctoral classes, a common exchange heard among cohort mates was thanks for an article that had been tracked down, reflecting an informal market on academic literature that emerged in the face of limited resources. Thus, access to references at TUJ is markedly different from the situation of our counterparts attending the same graduate program in Philadelphia with several libraries whose combined collections have over 2.4 million volumes. While things have improved considerably in the past several years due to the Internet, such a disparity is likely one shared by many institutions in peripheral contexts.

Faculty Availability

Another constraint related to the institution itself is the number of faculty members and their availability. Many doctoral students choose their programs either based on the specific faculty they can study with or on the overall reputation of a program, and we believe regular access to faculty is considered a given. However, within our group (the study participants) we felt that we did not have enough access to faculty members, as our opportunities to consult face-to-face with faculty members seemed limited by our travel time and teaching schedules (and that of the faculty members as well). The lack of opportunities for us to keep in close touch with our advisors often led to tension-filled situations, particularly during independent study projects and the dissertation writing process. Eton touched upon this during one workshop:

> There's time constraints. Look at like Jones [a professor] who has what, 20 different independent studies that he's trying to read and comment on and [this leads to his saying] "No, I'm only going to meet you three times this semester. . .And I'm going to cancel the last one" . . . . Some of the people in the peer group, the other peer group [a study group from a later cohort] are complaining, it was like all of a sudden Jones-at the last part of the semester because there's a conference coming or something-suggests, "Well, we don't need to meet again, do we?" (Tokyo workshop, June 2003)

Like many other institutions with limited resources, TUJ attempted to make up the difference by employing the services of visiting scholars (who are in residence for a semester), but this arrangement engendered availability issues of a different kind. While we (and the larger cohort) benefitted in many ways through exposure to what could be referred to as a who's who in the field of second language acquisition, developing close mentor-mentored relationships was difficult since prolonged contact past one semester of visitation was not possible. As Steve observed in a focus group discussion:

> [T]here's a difference in living in the same town as your advisor and knowing he or she has office hours from 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock and being able to schedule an appointment. I think it is a little different because we don't know the next time we are going to see Kathy [6] . You know, it's when there's a defense, or when you make special plans, or at a conference. Of course there's email, but it's a different relationship. (Tokyo workshop, June 2003)

E-mail correspondence improved communication between study participants and visiting scholars, but in our experience it was not uncommon to wait a month or even more before hearing back from mentors, who undoubtedly already had considerable demands on their time from their home institutions.

Working Full-time

While it is important to note the institutional constraints on faculty time, doctoral student schedules also played an important part in accessing faculty and time for reading and writing. Almost all of our cohort (of which study participants were a part) were working professionals teaching in either universities or high school settings. Many of them had to travel long distances to attend weekend classes after teaching during the week and thus were also stretched in terms of the time and energy needed to keep up with the doctoral courses. In addition to juggling professional demands, for the female members of our cohort, the intense course schedule coupled with traditional Japanese sociocultural norms concerning the roles of men and women made it challenging to maintain the fast pace the program demands. Andrea, in response to e-list postings of study participants' personal struggles commented that:

> . . . being married, divorced, single, aged, Western, non-Western, and so forth takes on different meanings depending on the local contexts we happen to be in at the time. In a country like Japan where traditional norms dictate that a professional woman's first priority should be her family, our professional and academic identities are formed both within and against mainstream, male-centered discourses which make it difficult for women to even talk about their careers in a way which is consonant with the discourse of successful professionals. (QBook e-list archive, 2003)

While students found it challenging to complete course assignments on time and maintain an outside academic reading, presentation, and publishing schedule, wives and mothers in the group who were expected to continue their usual share of domestic chores while pursuing a doctoral degree and working full time often had an exceptionally hard time keeping up with course work. Such constraints on student time are undoubtedly a feature of graduate studies world-wide, but they may be more pronounced in contexts where there are strict sociocultural expectations on females.

Academic Literacy and the Dissertation Writing Processes

As noted by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997, p. x), writing processes are an often neglected matter in doctoral program programs which "neither teach writing nor talk about it much." We found our doctoral program to be no exception. While the program included a course on dissertation and dissertation proposal writing at the end of the sequenced required courses, the main focus of this course was on preparing the dissertation proposal and attention was devoted primarily to "organizational and stylistic issues in writing a dissertation" (course description). Consistent with this description, we believe that the feedback many of us received on final papers for this course (the early drafts of our dissertation proposals) focused primarily on fulfilling APA guidelines. The bulk of our dissertation writing was either undertaken by us working on our own, or more frequently in the mentor-apprentice relationship of independent study courses. However, given the constraints on faculty time mentioned

earlier, dissertation writing largely is constructed as a solitary endeavor (contrast this with evolving understandings of the writing process as a socially situated activity, cf. Casanave, 2004).

For our Japanese cohort members, we think this presented particular challenges. Although all non-native English speaking doctoral students were required to have a 600 TOEFL score, we argue they were not always prepared for a Western style lecture and discussion format, not to mention the difficult academic English reading and writing assignments expected of a doctoral candidate in a program conducted solely in English (see Canagarajah (2002) and Cho (2004) for a discussion of NS/NNS academic power differentials in Center-based academia and publishing). Numerous informal discussions with our non-native English-speaking classmates (not necessarily study participants) made it quite clear that they felt themselves to be in a disadvantaged position.

The writing style required for the qualitative studies conducted by the participants of this study was especially trying to learn. As illustrated by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2001), quantitatively-oriented reports usually follow specific format guidelines and have an emphasis on statistical analyses. Qualitative writing, on the other hand, does not always follow these stylistic prescriptions, as there are differences in, for example, the epistemological and methodological starting points of the investigation. The following description of the *TESOL Quarterly's* qualitative research guidelines for case studies, illustrates how qualitative research can require a different way of writing:

> The richness of case studies is related to the amount of detail and contextualization that is possible when only one or a small number of focal cases and issues are analyzed. The writer's ability to provide a compelling and engaging profile of the case, with suitable examples and linkages to broader issues, is also very important. (*TESOL Quarterly*, 2006)

In more poetic terms, one participant compared the write-up of a qualitative report to "painting a tree, because there are so many dimensions and parts to it, and you are making something that is whole." (Tokyo workshop, June 2003). Faced with such stylistic differences, QBook members whose first language was not English felt that they were not well prepared for the literary genre of qualitative research (see also Cho, 2004). Commenting on the challenges of facing the differences in writing styles, one member who had few opportunities to take courses in qualitative research due to course scheduling wrote:

> Thus, my study evolved from a combination of quantitative and qualitative research into qualitative research, but still I could not give up the idea of using the quantitative data somewhere in my study. This persistent desire to keep the data was derived from my fear. That is, if my study became completely qualitative research, I thought I would need good and creative

writing skills, which I did not have. Being an L2 writer, I was very aware of some of the limitations to write a dissertation in English from the beginning of the writing process. On the other hand, I did not want to make any excuse for that. Therefore, I read several qualitative studies in order to learn how to write qualitatively. It was pleasure for me to read smooth flows and beautiful scholastic usage and expressions of those studies . . . . Reading well-written qualitative studies to learn how to write qualitatively was a good learning experience, but at the same time, it was discouraging and depressing to compare my writing with theirs. (QBook, e-list archive 2002)

Thus, although many cohort members were familiar with a quantitative research format from previous academic training, the prose style of qualitative research studies demanded a different mindset. Therefore, in addition to the stylistic conventions characteristic of a qualitative dissertation that we all needed to familiarize ourselves with, the non-native English speaking cohort members especially were faced with L2 academic reading and writing hurdles during their doctoral careers.

Conflicting Research Paradigms

While the challenges described thus far were pertinent to all doctoral cohort members studying at TUJ, the quote from the person just above begins to point to an additional constraint faced by the participants (QBook members) of this study. Up to the point of the cohort described in this paper, we believe qualitative research was marginalized in TESOL research, and accordingly course offerings for aspiring doctoral candidates at TUJ mainly covered quantitative classes [7] . Of the ten courses required by TUJ, four dealt with statistics or research design. An additional three were concerned with either curriculum and evaluation or technology. None of the courses featured qualitative research as its main focus (see Doctoral Program Description, 2005).

While we realize that course offerings were limited by the size of the program, we felt we did not have enough content on qualitative approaches. Moreover, when we were going through the program, there were virtually no courses focusing on the full range of theoretical frameworks (e.g., postmodernism, critical feminism, sociocultural theory, etc.) being applied to published qualitative studies at the time. However, our program appeared to be sensitive to then-recent qualitative turns in SLA and invited visiting faculty with expertise in qualitative research. By 2001, the time many of us were writing drafts of our dissertations, TUJ had hired a residential, full time faculty member who specialized in qualitative research and related theoretical frameworks.

The move at TUJ to include more coursework on qualitative research is reflected in the comments of the participants below. What emerges from the participant narratives is a pattern of being somewhat disillusioned with what quantitative methods could tell them about their studies, followed by some insight and a sense of direction imparted from visiting faculty. However, given the institutional constraints mentioned above, advice

from transient faculty was insufficient to fulfill the needs of cohort members doing their dissertations within qualitative framework. A new community was needed to follow through on the direction suggested by visiting scholars. It is in this way that the QBook, a community of qualitative researchers, emerged on what we felt was the periphery of our doctoral program.

Beginning with Susan, the account below shows some of the frustration that was caused by trying to put a round peg into a square hole and how she benefited from changing her approach.

> **Susan:** My first proposal was looking at teacher response, so I was looking at language, it was a linguistic study . . . so I looked at functions, I counted words and tokens, it was very quantitative research . . . So I looked at functions, I counted tokens, I counted words, I looked at topics, I did all that kind of research . . . . my students number of tokens and then my sister's number of tokens in her e-mail was exactly the same, and this didn't tell me anything . . . then I realized it doesn't tell me anything all this counting...and I think that was a critical moment for me. I didn't feel that it was telling me anything to do all this counting. I started reading about socialization, communities of practice, all of these, the qualitative research approach with Kathy of course. That was overwhelming though to begin with, so I never had Kathy as a role model. It was very overwhelming, qualitative research and the whole, the whole thing she did, her first course with us was very critical. I felt, gosh, I can't do anything like this, but then it sort of became more down to earth in a way, then I started feeling more comfortable with some parts, social theory of learning became . . . .background, so I didn't throw everything out, but the whole proposal is gone. (Tokyo workshop, June 2003)

Qualitative research methods introduced by visiting faculty offered Natsumi and Susan new ways to look at their data. Those of us with qualitative research agendas were encouraged to pursue topics we felt were different from those pursued by past cohorts. We shared a need to learn more about theory that was new to us, to obtain support in the dissertation writing process, and to have other opportunities to engage in the academic discourse of qualitative research in SLA. As revealed below, we fulfilled these needs in part by turning to each other and forming a community, and in part by engaging with the larger TESOL community of practice through conferences and interaction with scholars with similar interests.

An Emerging CoP: Practices, Identities and Relationships

In response to the constraints posed by institutional and personal factors, a group of doctoral students interested in applying qualitative methods and related theoretical perspectives to their dissertation projects coalesced into a community of practice.

Initially, we organized a workshop on qualitative research that was attended by interested students from Osaka and Tokyo. However, this evolved into more practices that helped us meet our needs while continuing to negotiate new practices and identities within the field of SLA. At first, our practices entailed online discussions about theory and research methods and evolved to include preparations for additional workshops on data analysis and writing up qualitative research. Through the on-line discussions, we also planned colloquia at international conferences and extended peer editing activities that began with members located in Tokyo. Together, these practices helped us develop academic literacies, gave us the means to legitimize our alternative research paradigms, and created forums within which to receive timely feedback on writing and research-related questions.

Building a Sense of Community

Perhaps the most important tool was an email discussion list (the QBook yahoo group site) that helped solidify our "common enterprise" of successfully completing our doctoral courses and dissertation projects. The following account from Lin Jing illustrates:

> To me, I get information, I get a place to ask people questions and get feedback. But to me the most important thing that the list gives me is that it helps me to kind of construct my academic identity. I think this has become such an important part of my life. I think coming here [TUJ] and going to classes is a job, but I think going back and reading the list, sometimes I don't read everything, but seeing messages coming out on the screen makes me feel good. (Tokyo workshop, June 2003)

On the one hand, for the members on the list who most actively contributed to these discussions, the postings provided them with an opportunity to work on "interim texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). For those who were less active in these discussions, they provided insight into theoretical frameworks that were not being covered in coursework at TUJ and models of how peers were writing about and considering applying these theories.

Despite different L1 backgrounds of the participants, members came to appreciate the value of offering multiple perspectives on doctoral-level activities. Eton recounts, "As we share our stories and learn together I sense that there is a considerable degree of alignment going on between all of us" (QBook e-list archive, February 2003). "Alignment" is one of the defining features of a CoP, a process that "bridges time and space to form broader enterprises so that participants become connected through the coordination of their energies, actions, and practices" (Wenger, 1998, p. 178). Roku described the QBook email postings as a "virtual place of engagement" (QBook e-list archive, February 2003), and thus the geographical and linguistic distance between native English speaking and non-native English speaking study participants located in

Tokyo and Osaka was reduced, allowing us to sustain our academic collaborations.

Another way in which the online discussion aided us was in the sharing of references. Sharing our projects online and during annual workshops, we became more familiar with the interests of our peers. As such, when we found a reading we felt was relevant to the group, a quick e-mail allowed us to pass on the reference with instructions on where the article could be found. These messages gave us an opportunity to practice summarizing what we had read, and while these summaries were less formal in register in the earlier stages we feel they became more academic in tone over time.

Scaffolding

We believe our exchanges (on and off-line) instantiated scaffolding [8] (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). One example that illustrates this point is an exchange between Andrea and Terry concerning the conceptual framework for his dissertation. Terry had previously uploaded a draft of his dissertation's introductory chapter to the QBook. Because Andrea had studied theoretical constructs of authors like Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and James Paul Gee for her own dissertation, she had developed a working knowledge of linguistic behavior and its connection to one's identity and social position. Hence, she suggested to Terry that he explore how being a white westerner in Japan would entail different language socialization experiences (Ochs, 1996) than those of foreigners from less prestigious cultural backgrounds.

Participants would pose questions and others would respond, for example:

> 12/30/02
>
> Dear All,
>
> Thank you Eton, for the great summary. It helps to make a quite daunting project . . . seem doable!? I have a question on positionality. What is it? It seems to include so many things. Could those of you who wrote about positionality in your studies tell us how you came to it and where in the study you wrote about it.

Andrea responded to Susan's message with the following:

> Happy New Year everyone! I'll respond to Susan and Natsumi here and hope that others will also join the discussion. Susan -- as for positionality, it refers to how you, the researcher, positions herself or is positioned by participants, institutions, society, etc. due to your age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconmic status, religion, etc. in your research relationships, in the community, and beyond. Let me quote a section from Suresh Canagarajah's book where he defines his positionality in his study of a Tamil community:

It is important to realize, however, that since cultures and subjectivities are multiple and hybrid it is difficult for anyone to claim that he or she is fully native to a culture or community. We enjoy different levels of membership in the different discourse communities within a single geographical (or national) boundary. In my case, I am in many ways a relative 'outsider' in my Tamil community: while the dominant religious identity is Aivite, I am Christian. While the emergent linguistic nationalism favors the Tamil monolinguals, I am a bilingual. My profession as an English teacher hold low academic and social status in the community at a time of linguistic nationalism. My middle-class bilingual identity would enjoy a coveted status among educated circles, while being stigmatized by monolingual groups. On the other hand, my male gender and vellalla caste identity provide certain forms of power in the local social hierarcky (although this status is also being increasingly questioned). Yet, born and raised in this community, and having been schooled in the vernacular-based educational system here, in some senses I enjoy in-group solidarity. The different levels of insider/outsider, higher/lower statuses I enjoy according to the different caste, class, religious, gender, and linguistic parameters create quite complex tensions. I realize the need to negotiate my own subject positions during the research and writing, in terms of the different subjects and contexts I encounter. (Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, Oxford Univ., 1999, p. 54).

As you can see from the above, positionality has a lot do with insider/outsider status not only while one is doing research but in our everyday social interactions as well. In your case Susan, I would think that your status as a college professor, female Japanese-American, etc. etc., positioned you in ways that were both different and similar to, for example, the ways I was positioned/positioned myself during my research at my junior college and in my community as a wife of a Japanese. 1/2/03

Hope everyone is having a relaxing oshoogatsu holiday!

After reading Andrea's response and the quote from Canagarajah, Natsumi wrote back:

Andrea, thank you so much for thoroughly explaining what positionality is and telling me about Canagarajah's ariticle. Now, I feel I need to elaborate my positionality in my dissertation so that the reader can understand why I decided to conduct my research more clearly. Andrea's suggestion to Susan in terms of her positionality, I'm willing to work with her if she wants.

Peer Editing Sessions

In addition to workshops and online discussions, peer-editing sessions evolved as a core practice. To address the limited contact with faculty during the writing process, six participants in the study created a peer-editing group that met monthly in Tokyo after the completion of the required courses. Over time, the peer editing practices of this group were incorporated into the e-mail list mentioned above making it possible for participants living in Nagoya and Osaka to participate. The peer editing provided moral support and motivation, and, we argue, a mechanism for members to learn from each other. In terms of motivation, peers in the group developed a sense of responsibility to the editing group over time and thus felt impelled to bring some writing to each meeting. The process of regularly sharing our writing over time encouraged us to work on our dissertations in smaller sections, or as Susan described it "in little steps while learning from each other." (Tokyo workshop, June, 2003).

In other cases, by reading each others' drafts, members of the group gained insight into how different theoretical frameworks could be applied to their own data. Furthermore, in the peer editing sessions, it was not uncommon for us to get involved in discussions that helped us refine our understanding of different theoretical frameworks. The editing sessions also gave us valuable training in providing critical feedback to our peers and practice in responding in ways that we imagined our advisors might. For example, in responding to Lin Jing's dissertation proposal, Steve noted that he looked at the proposal in a way that our advisor Kathy would:

> When I responded to Lin Jing's proposal, I think the way you word things, I said that Kathy may question the connections. I could see that the connections weren't there. I could have said, you are not making any connections, you've got to make connections. But I think it was my way of saying, "Well, Kathy may point this out to you" is a lot easier to accept than why don't you make connections? (Tokyo workshop, June 2003)

In taking Kathy's perspective as he commented on Lin Jing's paper, Steve was learning how to respond professionally and critically to the work of his peer. We not only learned from other models of writing, but also gained exposure to different models of giving feedback.

The peer editing sessions also gave us valuable training that facilitated later experience with editing and being a peer reviewer. An early instance of this was a co-edited volume (a TUJ sponsored working papers volume) by two study participants on qualitative research on Japanese learners in Japanese contexts (Churchill & McLaughlin, 2001). Meanwhile, Steve is currently editor of the *JALT Journal*, a biannual peer reviewed research journal of the Japan Association of Language Teachers and has edited several other volumes. Andrea, Susan and Eton all do occasional peer reviews for journals. In this way, the peer editing experience provided us with training that later facilitated

contributions to the TESOL field at large.

Closing Remarks

Doctoral programs (such as TUJ) located on the periphery offer a tremendous opportunity to expatriates and other English teaching professionals seeking a higher degree. These institutions also do a great deal to bring core members, seasoned scholars and teacher educators, to the periphery to create an academic hub for active professionals. However, just as opportunities are created, so are there constraints in what such programs can offer due to limited resources. Such institutional circumstances, when combined with personal constraints posed in the lives of the students who balance academic enrichment with professional and family demands, can lead to limitations on face-to-face time between faculty and students, particularly in the dissertation writing process. Needless to say, our stories did not emerge from an existential vacuum but rather were profoundly shaped by evolving circumstances in our everyday lives as doctoral students, teachers, researchers, and family members. We believe this is relevant to the field as a whole, and what is at stake is nothing less than doctoral students' academic identity.

In the process of negotiating our academic identities, a small group within our cohort created a community of practice within an overseas institution. The academic practices that we developed (e.g., peer editing, e-list discussions, workshops) overlapped with academic practices (e.g., dissertation writing) required by our program and allowed us to collaboratively compensate for the constraints we experienced. While e-list discussions and workshop/peer editing sessions were the main venues for our CoP interactions it was the on-going mutually constitutive nature of these practices and our academic identity formations that moved us to fuller participation as scholars within our doctoral program and the greater TESOL community. Natsumi shared the following:

> From my peers at editing sessions and different workshops, I gained suggestions and moral support, which was vital for me not to give up the whole writing process. The peer-editing session was a safe place to share similar feelings and problems related to dissertation writing. Taking part in QR workshops, I was able to learn different studies, which were stimulating to do more research; as a result, I gained more information for my study. On line discussions were also helpful to understand different writing processes and problems that individual writers faced and dealt with. On line support sometimes became "life line" for me when I desperately needed some specific information in a hurry. Kind peers provided me with what I needed for my dissertation writing. (Tokyo workshop, June 2003)

The concluding remarks above and narrative accounts in previous sections have addressed our research question concerning how study participants negotiated their

apprenticeship to local CoPs (TUJ, QBook) and, in the process, also became participating members in larger (TESOL, SLA) communities of practice. Abstract and significant terms such as "identity transformation" and "apprenticeship to academic discourses" were given a concrete form through the verbatim accounts of the participants.

Beyond stressing the importance of taking advantage of various networking opportunities within a CoP's shared repertoire, this study addresses how what we term traditional models of academic socialization cannot fully account for diverse ways of "being a doctoral student." More than just the mastery of a set of academic skills, we argue a successful doctoral experience entails the ability to engage in joint scholarly enterprises within and beyond one's local CoP. Narratives can be used to illuminate educational scenes by highlighting how successful entry into challenging academic environments is dependent on strategic integration of personal histories and collective practices. In light of the diverse nature of doctoral programs around the world, qualitative research paradigms can serve to uncover the complexities of negotiating practices, identities, and relationships in higher education communities of practice.

About the Authors

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Notes

[1] Our cohort consisted of over 40 members split between two locations (Tokyo and Osaka) with an equitable distribution of men, women, Japanese and non-Japanese.

[2] "Academic discourses" are those skills or practices (oral and written) that constitute the goals and activities of a particular academic community such as a doctoral cohort, TESOL service organizations, and so on. Members are expected to interact with other members within the boundaries of these discourses in ways that suit the community's interests and traditions.

[3] In line with the constructivist research paradigm we are following in this report, "identity" is viewed as an interactionally constructed formulation of self always contingent on ever-changing conditions in one's life.

[4] We define "constructivism" here as a paradigm based on the idea that "human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125). "Postmodernism" is often used for a range of approaches that posits identities as having a fragmented, evolving nature. Postmodernist researchers use data

collection and analytical methods such as narrative inquiry, participant observation, ethnography, etc. (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 for an outline) that are believed to be equipped to capture the complexities of a particular social scene.

[5] The Tokyo campus occupies six floors of a building, and the Osaka campus currently has an office and two classrooms in an office building.

[6] Kathy was a visiting professor from university in the U.S., who served as our dissertation advisor. Though attentive to our needs, she was not always physically present in Japan.

[7] As recently as 2004, it was reported the paradigms of qualitative and quantitative research have not been accorded equal status. See the special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* expressing concerns over the privileging of quantitative research. Bloch, 2004 is one example from this special issue.).

[8] "Scaffolding" is associated with theories of psychological development wherein the teacher and student engage in joint problem-solving activities that lead to self-regulatory development and independent problem solving.

Appendix A

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