

# Outsourcing in-service education in Japan: Challenges and issues

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines a four-month program of pedagogical training for Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) in Canada based on a yardstick provided for communicative language teaching (CLT) in-service education and training (INSET) programs for teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL). In particular, with the purpose of determining the overall effectiveness of the Canadian pedagogical program and offering recommendations for future ones, this study examines three dimensions of the four-month program: the program planning dimension, the program execution dimension, and the cultural dimension. Three paradigms are used to compare cultural and educational differences between Japan and Canada: the interpretation-based versus transmission-based culture paradigm (Wedell, 2003), the collectionist versus integrationist educational paradigm (Holliday, 1994a), and the routine/uncertain culture versus non-routine/certain culture paradigm (Sato, 2002). This qualitative study indicates that while the program meets almost all of the recommended criteria, especially in the execution dimension, a more thorough knowledge of Japanese educational culture and a re-examination of some assumptions on which the program is constructed may be useful to program planners and trainers in helping JTEs overcome barriers to incorporating CLT practices into their lessons.

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**KEYWORDS:** *teacher training, Japan, CLT, EFL, JTE*

## Introduction

In 2003, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereinafter referred to as “The Ministry of Education” or “MEXT”), initiated an action plan with the goal of “cultivating Japanese with English abilities” (Ministry of Education, 2003). In order to realize this goal, the Ministry called for ameliorations in the teaching ability of English teachers through the promotion of improvement in teacher hiring, evaluation and training, both domestically and abroad. Such overseas programs are generally of a six-month duration and generally take place in British, Australasian, or North American (BANA) contexts (Holliday, 1994b). This study examines the initial outcomes of one of these overseas programs: a Canadian pedagogical program participated in by Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs).

The innovations that are promoted by such programs are often perceived

solely in methodological terms, which limit the ways in which they can be adapted. In this paper, it is argued that such innovations should be conceived in socio-cultural terms, and those who wish to introduce innovations need to be aware of the potential impacts of socio-cultural constraints (Markee, 2001). Studies of the MEXT program in the Japanese context (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Lamie, 2001; Pacek, 1996) over a ten-year period have highlighted the following: socio-cultural constraints including prescribed textbooks and university examinations; institutional culture and beliefs, especially with regards to peers and hierarchical structures; large class sizes; community pressures in the form of parental influence and student expectations; and a lack of in-service training and support. Even if their beliefs may have changed to some extent, JTEs' practices seem to have stayed the same. Researchers of these programs (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Lamie, 2001; Pacek, 1996) frequently question what is being taught, and call for a higher degree of cultural awareness on the part of trainers. However, as has been demonstrated in the above-mentioned literature, JTEs continue to experience difficulties implementing practices which are not compatible with their daily classroom realities.

To date, while research exists about similar training programs in some BANA contexts, such as the United States, and the United Kingdom, (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Lamie, 2001; Pacek, 1996), there is no research on the Canadian version of the program. The Canadian program is worthy of study; however, because program planners and instructors, for a number of reasons, challenged and renegotiated program goals with MEXT, thus the Canadian program is somewhat different from the others.

## Literature review

Understanding how and where the implementation of innovation might prove less successful than hoped begins with a look at three dimensions: the innovation planning dimension, the program execution dimension and finally the cultural dimension. At the innovation planning dimension, participating teachers should not only initiate change, but should also be involved in all processes informing innovations, including deciding on training course content (Hayes, 1995; Kennedy, 1987, 1988; Waters, 2006; Waters & Vilches, 2001; Woods, 1988). Programs themselves should have specific, limited behavioural objectives, rationales for methodologies should come from what are generally considered constraints to innovation, examinations should fit any changed syllabuses or materials, and normative re-educative or social interaction approaches to training should be beneficial (Hayes, 1995, 2000; Holliday, 1992, 1994a; Kennedy, 1987, 1988; Lamb, 1995; Tomlinson, 1988; Woods, 1988). In addition, trainers should keep in mind that the nature of materials and teacher development is incremental (Hayes, 1995; Kennedy, 1987, 1988; Woods, 1988). Finally, to ensure that the innovation works through existing cultural, social and administrative systems, current practices and social factors influencing the behavior of guest teachers should be studied extensively (Hayes, 1995, 2000; Holliday, 1992, 1994a; Kennedy, 1987, 1988; Waters & Vilches, 2001; Woods, 1988).

At the program execution dimension, course tutors should know not only their subject material, but also have an awareness of the realities of the participants' teaching contexts. The course should be presented in interactive and humanistic ways, coherently and continuously and contain a balance of theory and practice. Finally, participants should determine and develop their own materials and be given chances to share what they have learned in a non-threatening environment (Hayes, 1995, 2000; Kennedy, 1987; Lamb, 1995; Palmer, 1993; Tomlinson, 1988; Waters, 2006; Waters & Vilches, 2001).

Underlying both dimensions is the idea that program planners and teacher trainers should strive for cultural continuity (Holliday, 2001), "achieved when meaningful bridges are built between the culture of the innovation and the traditional expectations of the people with whom we work" and demanding a sensitivity to "cultural expectations of the 'recipients' of innovation" (p. 169).

Because the program takes place in a BANA context and is participated in by teachers from TESEP (state education at tertiary, secondary and primary levels) (Holliday, 1994a, p. 12), it is necessary to examine the cultural dimension underlying program planning and highlight possible sources of difference between Canadian and Japanese contexts. To this end, three paradigms are useful: the interpretation-based versus transmission-based culture paradigm (Wedell, 2003), the collectionist versus integrationist educational paradigm (Holliday, 1994a) and the routine/uncertain culture versus non-routine/certain culture paradigm developed with specific reference to the Japanese educational context (Sato, 2002). While these categories may represent extreme ends of the continuum, they may be helpful in highlighting some major differences between Japan and Canada's educational cultures.

In Japan, education may be characterized as, to a great extent, transmission-based while in Canada, it may be characterized as largely interpretation-based. Table 1 highlights differences between Japan and Canada in terms of transmission-based versus interpretation-based educational contexts.

In fact, in Canada, the interpretation-based model seems to be inculcated in teacher training programs. For example, at York University in Toronto, among other values underlying the B.Ed. program are the assumptions that "[T]eaching is a problem-solving decision-making activity *rather than simply the implementation of a method or the transmission of information*" [emphasis mine], and "[a]ll teachers ... must ... be able to recognize and deal with individual differences" (Kosnik & Beck, 2004, p. 50).

It may also be that teacher trainers in interpretation-based contexts, because of the instrumental orientation toward language knowledge and use, focus on the transactional at the expense of the interactional (Widdowson, 1987). Transactional purposes are meant to meet certain explicit learning objectives; however, in the Japanese educational context, which is a TESEP context, interpersonal relations may even be seen as taking precedence over educational objectives (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999). Therefore, if an activity meets transactional objectives, such as pair work, which increases opportunities for students to practice using a language, it may be difficult for Japanese teachers to ask students to do that activity for interactional reasons, such as not wanting to disturb classroom harmony,

**Table 1**

Transmission-based versus interpretation-based educational contexts

Japan (transmission-based)	Canada (interpretation-based)
<p>Language proficiency is measured by entrance examinations which test facts about English.</p> <p>Learners are required to have the same knowledge about English.</p> <p>Teachers are expected to transmit knowledge to help students pass examinations.</p> <p>Teachers are expected to be highly knowledgeable about English.</p> <p>Examination questions are of the chiefly discrete-point type and there is one accepted answer to any question.</p> <p>The role of learners is to receive instruction from the teacher in a lecture format and take notes, answering questions only when called on by the teacher (Eckstein et al., 2003).</p>	<p>English language teaching tends to be instrumentally oriented.</p> <p>There is an emphasis on the process of learning, and teachers may be seen as facilitators.</p> <p>English is a tool to be used.</p> <p>Student self-expression is encouraged.</p> <p>A sense of egalitarian principles may dictate student-teacher relationships.</p>

isolate students with emotional or mental problems, or make shy students feel uncomfortable, which may ultimately erode students' trust in teachers.

The collectionist versus integrationist paradigm explicates professional-academic cultures (Holliday, 1994a). Again, while these categories may represent extreme ends of the continuum, they may be helpful in highlighting the contrasts in some major tendencies between the educational cultures of Japan and Canada. Table 2 contrasts the Japanese collectionist orientation and the Canadian integrationist orientation.

**Table 2**

Collectionist versus integrationist paradigm

Japan (collectionist)	Canada (integrationist)
<p>English is taught as a separate subject and generally those teaching it have little or no contact with colleagues outside their subject area (Sato, 2002).</p> <p>Teachers use lecture styles.</p> <p>The focus of study is on knowledge about rather than the use of English.</p> <p>Timetabling is rigid; teachers feel they must keep the same pace as their colleagues.</p> <p>Relations are vertical (Eckstein et al., 2003).</p> <p>Subject knowledge is an indicator of a teacher's professionalism.</p> <p>Teachers tend not to communicate classroom practices with their peers (Sato, 2002).</p>	<p>There may be a more interdisciplinary view about subjects or subject boundaries may even be blurred.</p> <p>Pedagogy seems to reflect a focus on skills, discovery, and collaboration.</p> <p>Teachers can teach at their own pace.</p> <p>Identity is related to teaching ability.</p> <p>Relations among teachers are egalitarian.</p> <p>Classroom practices may be transparent.</p> <p>A spirit of democracy may prevail.</p>

**Table 3**

Routine/uncertain culture versus non-routine/certain culture

Japan (routine/uncertain)	Canada (non-routine/certain)
<p>Teachers are uncertain about their instructional practice.</p> <p>Teachers are engaged in a day-to-day routine.</p> <p>Teachers are unlikely to communicate with their colleagues about teaching issues, and tend to rely on established approaches to teaching.</p> <p>Teachers may remain faithful to routines that guarantee their survival both in the classroom, and interpersonally with colleagues.</p>	<p>Teachers may feel confident about their instruction.</p> <p>Teachers' daily practices may be unpredictable.</p> <p>Teachers may be more likely to incorporate a variety of teaching approaches (such as the communicative approach) into their repertoire.</p>

In short, there appear to be differences between the collectionist and integrationist paradigms in terms of how English and professionalism are perceived as well as how teachers teach, pace their teaching, and relate with colleagues.

Differences may also exist with regard to the relation between teaching context and teachers' beliefs and practices. Sato (2002) citing Kleinsasser (1993) in his study distinguished between routine/uncertain cultures and non-routine/certain cultures. Table 3 summarizes practices in both cultures.

Teachers from routine/uncertain cultures may adhere to routine practices not only because of uncertainty about their teaching, but also because of concern over their colleagues' perception of them.

### Rationale for the study

While cultural continuity (Holliday, 2001), and the need for it, are often mentioned in research on CLT innovation in EFL contexts, there seems to be little research on development and delivery of programs incorporating the concerns from the point of view of program planners and instructors. The 2007 Canadian MEXT program was measured against recommendations for successful language education innovation, examining in detail its inception, development and delivery and suggests that a greater knowledge of Japanese educational culture might influence program planning so that such programs have a better chance of benefitting JTEs who attend them.

The following research questions guided data collection methods and analysis:

1. On what bases do program planners and instructors construct the MEXT program?
2. What do they know about Japanese teachers of English and how does this knowledge influence program planning?
3. What assumptions do program planners and instructors make about the goals of sponsoring institutions or Japanese teachers which may lead them to advocate teaching practices JTEs' may perceive as incompatible with the Japanese educational context?

## Method

In order to analyze the impact of the MEXT program on participating JTEs, a longitudinal, observational case study method was chosen. Various methods of data collection were used (document collection, questionnaires, observations, and oral interviews) over a sustainable one-and-a-half-year period of time (Cresswell, 2003; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### *Participants*

This study was undertaken in Canada and Japan in order to follow up on the participants as they went through the program and upon their return to Japan. At the Canadian institution, the program coordinator, her assistant and four core instructors participated in this research. Table 4 summarizes the host personnel's level of education, teaching experience, experience with the MEXT program and overseas teaching experience.

### *Data Collection/Analysis*

Questionnaires, personal and official documents (such as contracts between the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the host institution) were collected and class observations (as an observer or participant observer, depending on the instructor) were conducted. Data were collected on site via note-taking and audio-recording. The researcher followed Cresswell's (2003) generic guide for analysis and interpretation. After the data were prepared, they were coded using *in vivo* terms using the NVivo software program and emergent themes were identified.

## Results

Each dimension of the program will be examined in order to determine how the program meets the recommended criteria.

### *The Innovation Planning Dimension*

#### *Teacher-initiated program development*

Although the Canadian program is initiated by the Japanese Ministry of Education and almost half of the sponsored participants in the 2007 program were obligated to attend, the host university did involve them to some extent by asking them, prior to arriving in Canada, to begin preparing for their individual Professional Development Dossiers<sup>1</sup> by doing several activities to help them focus on their particular area of interest.

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<sup>1</sup> The Professional Development Dossier is a "tool kit" containing an essay on each teacher's particular teaching challenges, and activities prepared to address such challenges.

**Table 4**Host university personnel profiles<sup>2</sup>

Name	Position	Education	Teaching Experience (years)	MEXT Experience (years)	Overseas Experience
Emma	Program Coordinator	B.A. Honours (English/French) M.A. Applied Linguistics (Translation)	35	7	Algeria (2 years)
Megan	Assistant Coordinator	B.A. (TESL) M.A. (TESL) Ph.D. (Education—in progress)	12	6	Venezuela (3 years)
Regina	Professional Development Dossier (P.D.D.)/ Testing and Measurement Module Instructor	B.A. (International Studies) M.A. (TESL) Ph.D. (Educational Measurement)	30	4	Norway (6 years) Taiwan (1 year) China (1 year) Hong Kong (6 months) Japan (6 weeks)
Trevor	Pedagogical Tools Module Instructor	B.A. (Cultural Studies) M.A. (Applied Linguistics) Ph.D. (Education—in progress)	10	3	Korea (6 years)
Pamela	Productive Skills Module Instructor	B.A. (History/French) B.A. (Lettres Francais) M.Ed. (TESL)	30	2	Egypt (2 years)
Karen	Receptive Skills Module Instructor	B.A. (Political Science) B.Ed. M.Ed.	18	First time	

With regard to the educational program itself, MEXT gave specific instructions about the number of hours of instruction, a general idea of program content, the number of school visits, responsibility for post-program language testing, and teacher-participant ratios and left the course content detail up to the Canadian course planners and instructors. Emma, the program coordinator, described the overall goals for the program: “It follows the MEXT specification (from the 2003 Action Plan) about wanting ... their teachers to be able to teach English as a tool of communication, not as a subject ... ”

#### *Specific, limited behavioral objectives*

The Canadian teachers conceived of the overall goals of the program in consistent ways. As stated by Emma, “... the objective is not to get them to write a good research paper. The objective is to get them to think of good ways for them

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms have been given to the staff.

to improve their classroom, their comfort level in English and their way of transmitting the language." In addition, although communicative language teaching drove the program in many ways, according to Emma, the program's goal was not to mandate one particular methodology over another.

Several recurring themes about the program's purpose emerged from the data: to enable JTEs to use and teach English as a tool for communication, to help JTEs feel more comfortable doing so, to help them prepare activities relevant to their particular contexts, and to increase their knowledge so that they could make informed choices about teaching techniques. The words "tool kit," "choices," and "wider array" were mentioned frequently by all the teachers in the program.

Regarding behavioral objectives, Emma, the program coordinator, said, "I try to encourage the (Canadian) teachers in the program to get the MEXT participants up in front of the class doing the teaching, doing mini-teaching, and maybe even introducing the class; things like that." Class observations showed that instructors did indeed incorporate these activities into their regular classroom practice.

#### *Constraints drive program planning*

While all teachers were aware of constraints JTEs face, such as entrance examination pressures; teachers' perceived lack of fluency, proficiency, or confidence; expectations of parents and students; lack of time; large class sizes; and a host of others, only Pamela explicitly mentioned constraints as guiding her course planning.

On the other hand, Trevor generally took a critical stance towards many of the constraints mentioned by JTEs and challenged their beliefs in their ability to hinder implementation of what he had recommended with regards to CLT. For example, he wondered about the veracity of JTEs' belief that grammar was more relevant to entrance examination success and also challenged participants' beliefs in their own lack of fluency. In the end, perhaps while instructors might have been aware of constraints, it cannot generally be assumed that they used them to drive course design.

#### *Trainers have knowledge of institutional demands and broader social contexts*

Many teachers recognized the transmission-based nature of Japanese education and that teachers' role is to be an expert, transmit knowledge and test it. Regina said she believed that JTEs felt that, as teachers, their role was to be on guard for and correct mistakes. She also felt that Japanese teachers, compared to their Canadian counterparts, seemed to know more about some kinds of testing. Trevor expressed a belief that at the heart of participant resistance to change was the idea of their not fulfilling their expected duties as teachers.

Some teachers also seemed aware of classroom dynamics, such that, in Japan, learners are members of a group and speak only when spoken to. With regards to communication styles and communicating with JTEs, Pamela noted that participants were not "culturally comfortable" with expressing their opinions directly, which is why she felt scaffolding activities were effective. With regards to classroom interactions, she felt that over the years she was beginning to get better



at learning to see signals and interacting in a way participants felt comfortable with.

Considering the idea of collectionist culture, some teachers were aware of the hierarchical nature of Japanese education. Both Emma and Pamela mentioned some differences they felt existed between the JTEs themselves, depending on whether they taught in junior or senior high school, or whether they came from rural or urban areas. For instance, according to them junior high school JTEs from remote areas had a markedly lower level of proficiency than those from urban areas or high schools. They both noticed that there seemed to be a social hierarchy among the JTEs, with the high school teachers having higher status or as Emma said, "a sense of entitlement", than the junior high school teachers. Pamela also mentioned that when JTEs were interacting, some felt intimidated by others for having higher English proficiency or for being senior in age. Emma also seemed to have realized, after previous encounters with JTEs in the program, that strict adherence to scheduling was important to JTEs.

With regards to routine/uncertain culture, Emma, knowing that JTEs might be frightened of trying new practices, said that she tried to ensure that they had opportunities to practice in sheltered environments. Regina also commented on JTEs' routine practices with regards to the teaching of reading, and how they differ from those in Canada. She also said she believed that it was difficult for JTEs to think about teaching grammar or writing in new ways and referred to JTEs following these routine practices as "being on autopilot."

Concerning classroom practice, Karen, from the information she had gleaned from her colleagues, believed that the JTEs' classes were highly structured, that these teachers used translation, and graded material, and classes were characterized by "individual work as opposed to group and pair exchanges."

The Canadian planners and instructors also said they had learned other things about Japanese culture over the years, such as how to read between the lines, and that Japanese people do not express their feelings overtly. So, as Karen said, "... you may get the wrong impression of whether or not they like what you're doing or dislike what you're doing."

Some instructors also mentioned they knew that there were different kinds of schools, such as academic or vocational, and that participants' opportunities to innovate depended on their school environments, including whether schools were located in urban or rural areas. They also knew that not all schools had entrance examinations constraints, and that some rural schools had more flexibility in course offerings. Megan was aware of changing student demographics in Japanese schools and that schools which traditionally had been deemed "prestigious" in the past and attracted high-ability students now "... had to face the reality of having students who are very good and motivated and some who are not, who get in because ... their school has slipped and all of a sudden they qualify to get some of these lower-level students."

While the instructors seemed to know a great deal about JTEs, there were several problem areas which were mentioned by the program planner or instructors which may have been culturally-based. Emma, in frequent meetings with JTEs, wondered about differences in meeting styles and felt a strong need to create a more egalitarian environment. She realized that there was a hierarchy

among the JTEs, but did not understand how it worked or how group leaders were chosen.

Canadian teachers' knowledge about teacher training in Japan was also quite inconsistent and even those who had been working in the program for a number of years had little knowledge of how participants were trained domestically. Some knew that Asian students in general studied English literature, but otherwise admitted to knowing little or nothing about teacher education in Japan. Those who knew anything learned it by chance, such as Regina who said she only learned by asking program participants directly.

Canadian teachers may also have been reading situations differently from JTEs. For example, Emma told the following story to illustrate that JTEs make generalizations about specific situations; however, what may also be revealed is something about participants expecting equal treatment from instructors, which is consistent with a transmission-based educational culture where all learners need the same knowledge: ... *they will tend to take one specific detail and kind of generalize it and we have to be careful of that. One teacher last year, for some very unrelated reason wasn't able to start her mentoring at the same time as the other teachers, and it did come back, not right away, but in the reports that one of the teachers was not doing her job properly because she didn't spend as much time with the mentors as the others.*

### *Incremental change*

Some of the Canadian teachers explicitly expressed the idea that change was incremental and that they would be satisfied with small changes in participants' beliefs and practices. Pamela, in mentioning pre-program discussions with the others, said that, "I think if they can come out of here with the confidence that they could use English and that they could find a way for their students to use it in the classroom a little bit ... 'If you can just help them do this much, this much, (showing a small gap between thumb and forefinger) it'll be a huge thing for them.'" For Trevor, however, because generally his course was a little more theoretical than the others, he said that he did not expect to see changes in the short term.

### *Normative re-educative/Social interaction approaches*

It appears that empirical-rational strategies, which assume that people are rational and will be persuaded to adopt innovations if persuaded of the benefits, may have been the dominant model used in the Canadian program. Trevor, in talking of his course goals said, "... my goal for this program is for teachers to become more aware of other ways of teaching so that they can make informed choices. And if they choose to continue teaching the way they've been teaching, they do that fully aware of what they're not choosing to do." This is echoed by Regina in talking about the goals of her course, "And then in measurement and evaluation just to get them aware of the basic concepts and again, a wider array of techniques, a wider array, you know, expose them to different options that can or cannot be, you know adaptable for them, or that they could or could not choose to adapt, depending on what might work."

### *The Innovation Execution Dimension*

#### *Knowledge of subject area and ability to convey it*

As indicated in the instructor profiles in Table 4, all the instructors in the MEXT have the relevant academic qualifications, and an average of 20 years of teaching experience. Based on class observations, the instructors seem to be successful at conveying what they know. And, as recommended by research, classes are taught in ways instructors are recommending to participants. When asked about the style of courses, Emma said that participants would have to do assignments and presentations. "The classes are run the way we do our language classes; group work, teamwork, pair work ..." According to one instructor, this focus on modeling is one of the program's strengths. She related a comment made by a previous Japanese participant: "Modelling. And that's what one of them said to me, 'You model what you told me.'"

#### *Experience in or awareness of teaching in situations similar to those of JTEs*

Almost all of the instructors have overseas experience teaching EFL and some of them related experiences they felt were very similar to those of the participants. Megan said that she believed there were similarities in Venezuelan and Japanese EFL contexts, especially with regards to requirements for textbook use and pacing. Although the focus of the course in Venezuela was more on oral communication and listening than on reading and writing, she felt that the texts, like Japanese ones, followed predictable patterns. She also spoke of a guest speaker who would be giving a lesson about teaching Core French to the JTEs during the program and mentioned similarities to the number of class hours spent learning English in Japan to the number of class hours spent learning Core French in some parts of Canada.

Pamela, on several occasions, likened teaching Core French in Western Canada, which she herself had done, to EFL teaching, so felt she could identify with the context of JTEs, especially in terms of class sizes, varying student ability levels, no exposure to French outside the classroom and just the day-to-day trial and error of teaching a language she was not fluent in herself.

Trevor taught EFL in Korea for 6 years at the tertiary level and was also a teacher trainer there. He explained that he had heard that English education there was heavily influenced by Japan in the past and that many of the issues facing JTEs are similar to those facing Korean teachers of English, such as entrance examination pressures. He also mentioned that he had been dismissive of the importance of entrance examinations in Korea until someone had informed him that students were known to commit suicide when they didn't succeed on such tests, saying, "... no matter how silly I think it is, um, there are good reasons for them to be concerned about this, this life-changing ... mark."

#### *Interactive and humanistic learning theories*

A humanistic approach is evident in Emma's characterization of the participants as experienced professionals and the program being an exchange of ideas rather

than a one-way transmission of approaches from host to guest. Instead of telling JTEs to cease current practices, such as grammar translation, she hoped instructors would help JTEs find ways to incorporate current and new practices in the most useful ways to meet their needs.

As mentioned previously, "choice" and "wider array" were words frequently used by instructors in the MEXT program. Regina felt that giving choices to participants would turn them off "auto pilot", a phrase she repeatedly used, and help them make more informed choices based on sound theoretical principles rather than routine practice. Within the course itself, Pamela offered participants options, for example, how much or how little they wanted to read about theory.

However, Trevor mentioned that it was important to remind participants that they were being given options and were not duty-bound to apply everything they were learning. Also, they should not expect to be told what to do by instructors in the program.

#### *Consistent and coherent presentation*

Emma explained the rationale behind the system of the courses stating that JTEs were not academics, but teachers. The purpose of the program was to help them experience Canadian culture and learn methodology. The course followed a regular schedule of skills courses four days a week, class visits, and other scheduled activities. Participants were given copies of the schedules and syllabi and knew generally what to expect from week to week.

In designing her Receptive Skills course, Karen seemed to be guided by empathy and logic, trying to understand, by putting herself in the JTEs' shoes, what they might need to know. She then listed the kinds of activities she did in her reading classes, went through materials about teaching reading and reading processes and incorporated what she thought would be useful in relating theory directly to practice and ordering them in a logical manner.

In choosing guest speakers, Megan tended to focus on those she felt would support and reinforce the pedagogical goals of the program, and based on the needs and interests of the participants. Guest speakers talked about such topics as teacher education in Canada and special needs education. Selection of schools and classes for class visits was based on similar criteria and also to expose participants to a wide variety of educational settings in Canada. JTEs could expect to visit elementary and secondary schools, as well as French immersion schools, to witness L2 teaching.

#### *Balance of theory and practice*

Many teachers involved in the program spoke of the need for a balance between theory and practice. Megan, in sharing her perspectives on the evolution and goals of the Professional Development Dossier (P.D.D.), said that JTEs would be exposed to some basic theory and then be required to develop activities, relevant to their classes, exemplifying that theory. Trevor explained that his lessons were characterized by theory being extracted from a practical activity. He would start

with the activity and then have JTEs work to pull the theory out from it. Regina characterized her class as being based on practice with a “teeny bit” of theory.

#### *Development of materials based on needs*

According to Emma, “... our approach is really tailored to their needs and therefore adapted to their interests and their needs”. This is echoed by most of the instructors in the program. Pamela reiterated that the goal of her course was to help participants develop activities that are appropriate to and workable in their teaching contexts and that participants feel comfortable using.

#### *Opportunities to collaborate and experiment in a non-threatening environment*

Pamela offered some details about collaborative activities in her classes, highlighting that JTEs would do presentations and see what their colleagues offer, and stating that this was a “great opportunity” for them to spend time in the program collaborating with other JTEs. She also explicitly said that the activities she does are designed in such a manner as to make participants comfortable: “... they do presentations in the class and they do it in pairs to make it less intimidating.” She felt that participants appreciated having a chance to put into practice what was being recommended to them.

## **Discussion**

### *Assumptions and recommendations*

#### *JTE involvement*

Although prior research recommends that participants be involved in the initiation and planning of an innovation, as mentioned above, this did not occur in the MEXT program. However, this is not unusual within the hierarchical socio-cultural context of Japanese society, where the power to promote educational innovation rests with a few senior decision-making ministry officials who expect teachers to implement whatever decisions are made. Thus, it is the norm that teachers are used to not being consulted about innovations directly affecting them (LoCastro, 1996; Markee, 1997). However, this does not mean that Japanese teachers would not wish to be involved in the innovation process at initial stages. In fact, Sato (2002) seems to believe that “... communication-oriented ELT does not appear to be attainable” (p. 81) in Japan without a higher degree of teacher investment.

#### *Obligatory versus voluntary participation*

Although Emma expressed the conviction that JTEs were in Canada, because “... they want to learn our way” and, as mentioned above, since MEXT has stated that its goals are for teachers to learn TESL methodology, it is quite understandable that Canadian instructors might assume that the same kind of training they give ESL teacher trainees in Canada would be suitable for EFL teachers in Japan. In addition,

since they may have only vague ideas of how participants are selected, they may believe that all of them have a sincere and strong desire to learn methodology as it is known and practiced in Canada. However, almost half of the participants were selected by their Boards of Education to attend the program; some of whom had no idea why. This could explain, in part, why some practices may be rejected outright by participants who did not initiate their participation in the program. They may be resisting new ideas because they feel they are being criticized for using outdated techniques, are concerned that their self-esteem and security may be threatened, or, because, as several participants indicated, consensus is paramount, so are concerned at being considered radical or trying to undermine their colleagues (Tomlinson, 1988).

### *JTE self-positioning*

Although Emma stated that she viewed the participants as professionals bringing a wealth of experience and would treat them on an equal footing with instructors, most JTEs participating in the 2007 program did not necessarily position themselves in the same way. One participant, for instance, in the initial interview when asked about his expectations of the Canadian instructors said, "Of course, I am a teacher in Japan, but here I'm a student, so just one of the students, not teacher ... so strict education is what I want here ... I want them to train us strictly." Other participants also seemed to perceive themselves in a similar light hoping that the Canadian teachers would correct their English in a detailed manner or impart information about methodology. In short, JTEs appear to be positioning themselves as students, behaving as they believe students should in a transmission-based context.

### *Program design*

The assumptions that program planners make, based on information they receive from the Ministry of Education, may lead them to make suppositions about the goals of the program, which in turn will likely influence program design. According to Holliday (1994a):

It is a fact of organizational life that project managers, and the consultants who precede them, begin, in their search for the information they need, by communicating with the host institution at the formal, official, surface action level ... they are more likely to hear about the official line upon which the institution is supposed to operate than about what really happens" (p. 133).

That the Ministry gives a general communicative mandate and requirements about class hours, sizes, number and school visits, etc. seems to reflect what Holliday refers to as "surface" action. However, without corresponding knowledge of "deep action", that which happens in the classroom and those that affect what happens, program planners may be missing an important part of the picture. If the Canadians design their program based on surface specifications, without understanding cultural and administrative factors affecting the lives of participants, their program outcomes may not be as satisfactory as they might wish.

**Table 5**Comparison of MEXT and University of Canada<sup>3</sup> Goals

Goals as stated by MEXT	Goals as stated by the Host Canadian University
The purpose of the program is to strengthen participants' ability to communicate in English in both informal and academic settings, expose participants to current theory and scholarship in the methodology of Teaching English as a Second Language and assist participants in the production of a P.D.D.	The primary objective of the program is to promote communicative approaches to language teaching. Such approaches help learners develop the ability to use the language accurately, appropriately, and effectively for communication. Since Communicative Language Teaching stresses the importance of language as a tool for communicating information and ideas, MEXT participants will be given the opportunity to put into practice concepts they explore in the classroom through the creation of a P.D.D.

Related to this is the assumption that participants are mindful of MEXT goals and eager to put them into practice. This may not be entirely true, however. In fact, Wada's (2002) study revealed that in academic schools, teachers felt that they had to first, teach the content of the textbook, second, prepare students for examinations, and third, follow Ministry Guidelines. In vocational schools, teachers felt their responsibility was to first, teach the contents of the textbook, second, make parents happy, and third, prepare students for entrance examinations. In the latter case, it seems that MEXT guidelines are not considered at all.

#### *Program goals: Different interpretations*

Another assumption may be that MEXT's goals, the participants' goals, and the Canadian host university's goals are identical. Table 5 compares the goals as stated by MEXT and interpreted by the Canadian host university.

It is apparent that MEXT's goals are for the Canadian teachers to focus on improving participants' own English abilities, increase their knowledge base in TESL, (interestingly, not TEFL, the reality of English language teaching in Japan), and to help them produce their dossiers. On the Canadian side, the instructors believe their purpose is, with a focus on the participants' own students, to promote Communicative Language Teaching and to apply the concepts they learn to practical use. In short, MEXT appears to value an increase in participants' gleaning of knowledge, while the University of Canada emphasizes participants' *using* such knowledge. It may be that both MEXT and the host university are unaware of these differences in interpretation. This may be because of implicit collectionist or integrationist orientations. "Whereas the integrationist curriculum developer sees importance in practical application, and the development of a materials writing and implementation *skill*, the collectionist and therefore subject-oriented local lecturers see learning new developments in a *subject matter*, in this case pure or applied linguistics, as an end in itself" (Holliday, 1994a, p. 122).

<sup>3</sup> A pseudonym

*Tatemaie and honne (principle and true intention)*

If Canadian program planners and instructors take MEXT's goals at face value and believe their interpretation of them is correct, it is reasonable that they might use the Action Plan to drive program planning. The program coordinator stated that the overall goals for the program came from the "MEXT specification about wanting ... their teachers to be able to teach English as a tool of communication, not as a subject." Indeed, the Action Plan does state that its goals for English classes are for students to develop communication abilities through the repetition of activities making use of English, and that JTEs should teach English classes mainly through the medium of instruction in English, employing small-group teaching and grouping students according to their proficiency level (Butler & Iino, 2005). These demands appear, on the surface, to be attainable and are not so far removed from those goals of ESL teachers in Canada, but may actually be far removed from the reality of JTEs' daily practice.

In a study of proposed changes to English language education in Japan in the early 90s (LoCastro, 1996), it was found that the Ministry-produced curriculum "gives evidence of having been written with the best of intentions, and shows an awareness of the current trends in language learning in the Anglo-American context. The overall aims are impressive ..." (p. 44). One problem is that the interpretation of these terms may be different in Japanese and Canadian contexts. In a previous Ministry of Education initiative, one implication was that successful communication depended on "organizing elements of sentences in 'correct' order" (LoCastro, 1996). While this is something culturally sanctioned in the Japanese context, "successful communication" may likely have a completely different meaning in Canada. In addition, socio-cultural factors, such as the prevalence of entrance examinations, an emphasis on content knowledge, and characteristics of appropriate classroom interactional behavior, which may be markedly different from the regime of the 'communicative' classroom, where a certain type of student behavior is demanded (Holliday, 1994a, p. 97) appeared to be overlooked by such proposals; thus, the changes did not take place as planned.

Questions arise, too, from the implementation of the 2003 Action Plan in various areas such as assessment and notions of egalitarianism contained within it. First, while using external assessments may prove useful in evaluating Japanese students against international standards, these same assessments do not align with curricular demands and instructional practices. Second, while the plan encourages schools to promote unique and/or individualized English education to achieve its goals, this type of "streaming" goes against the grain of Japanese public school system, which has no such structure; students in Japan proceed through mandatory education by age, regardless of their abilities (Butler & Iino, 2005). In fact, ability grouping has been considered a taboo subject "because of the egalitarian philosophy of education following World War II" (Ishikida, 2005, p. 27).

The implications, then, are that Canadian program planners should be cautious in interpreting MEXT curricular or instructional goals as Japanese interpretations of terms may be different from Canadian ones, MEXT initiatives may not figure strongly in teachers' daily realities, and the goals of the innovations, while reasonable on the surface, may be impractical or culturally inappropriate.



## *Interpreting Constraints*

### *Time*

Participants in previous MEXT programs as well as the 2007 program mentioned time as the biggest constraint affecting their ability to implement what they had learned in Canada. Although most of the Canadian planners and trainers knew that time was a constraint for Japanese participants, some of the activities they recommended were time-consuming to either prepare or to implement, and so were rejected by JTEs.

Planners might want to keep in mind that Japan is an example of a collectionist culture where teachers must follow a set curriculum and keep pace with their peers. They have little time to prepare supplementary activities for class, or do activities in class which may use up the precious little time they have to cover the required textbook. Although one participant thought he could surmount this obstacle by giving communicatively-oriented homework to his students, he felt that he could not expect them to always do it.

### *Autonomy*

JTEs in previous programs as well as the Canadian 2007 program said that they often felt unable to innovate without the consent of their colleagues. Because Japanese teachers feel they must follow the same set curriculum at the same pace, they will likely use the same classroom practices and materials as their peers. If they do not, their work environment may become uncomfortable, and "they may even be denied chances for professional development" (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999, p. 175). The interactional takes precedence over the transactional at both the classroom and collegial level. Even if teachers believe a certain practice would be useful, they feel they would not be able to implement it without consensus.

### *Student factors*

Some JTEs mentioned student factors as constraints on their classroom practices. Here again, transactional purposes may be supplanted by interactional purposes. If teachers are more concerned about keeping classroom harmony and students with emotional or mental problems from feeling isolated, they may abandon activities, such as those involving pair or group work that might threaten relations between students themselves or between students and teachers. Holliday (1994a) recommends that "we should not treat the learning group ideal as the operational norm, and cultural factors which inhibit its operation as problems; we should treat the cultural factors as given, and how to make the learning group ideal appropriate to these factors as problematic" (p. 108). Therefore, maintaining classroom harmony, and good interrelations between teachers and students, should be considered as factors guiding program planning.

The culture of Japan being generally a transmission one may explain why a teacher might reject the idea of learning about and teaching to individual learners. In such a culture, students are expected to receive the same instruction in the same way. Thus, individual learning styles may be viewed as irrelevant,

not meeting Kennedy's (1988) third criterion for innovation acceptance. Or, as in the Japanese context, it may be deemed "undemocratic": democracy in Japan meaning everyone's right to the same education (Shimahara, 1986).

### *Cultural appropriateness*

Some JTEs in the 2007 program wondered about the cultural appropriateness of the activities they were learning to do. Keeping in mind that Japan's educational culture is transmission-based and collectionist, it may not be surprising that debates or other activities demanding students to display their ability in front of their peers may be avoided by teachers as not being culturally appropriate.

### *Simulation vs reality*

While most JTEs found trying out activities in ESL classes at the host university satisfactory, one Japanese participant's comment on practice teaching in ESL classes at the host university underscored overall cultural differences between Canada and Japan in terms of who the students are, what they are being taught, and how they are expected to behave in class. While a demonstration lesson may be viewed as a good activity in itself in one context, it may have limited practical applicability in another.

## **Conclusion**

The Canadian MEXT program seems to meet many recommendations for innovation success, especially at the program execution dimension. However, such programs could possibly be improved if program planners and instructors are mindful, especially at the innovation planning dimension, of some cultural factors that may affect program design and outcomes. First, they might want to be more cautious in interpreting MEXT goals, as MEXT may be defining its terms or approaching its requirements from a very different standpoint than that of Canadian planners and instructors, even if the terminology appears similar. Second, planners and instructors might wish to use constraints to drive program planning, since these constraints are very real and persistent and reflect the realities of the educational culture of participants' countries. To this end, host planners and instructors may benefit from learning more about and appreciating the real world of JTEs within their educational contexts (Holliday, 1994a), keeping in mind that while planners and instructors appear to come from an interpretation-based, integrationist, non-routine/certain culture paradigm, the needs of participants coming from transmission-based, collectionist, routine/uncertain culture paradigm the programme may be quite different. If planners and instructors are aware, not only of constraints, but also of their own potential cultural biases, there may be an ever greater chance that methodologies being taught by Canadian, or indeed any foreign trainers to Japanese teachers, or teachers coming from similar cultural contexts, may one day be put into practice in their English classrooms.

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