



I've been teaching English and Applied Linguistics in Japan for nearly a quarter of a century, but I still don't feel entirely comfortable with the identity of "teacher". Indeed, it is perhaps this feeling of awkwardness and of uncertainty that is the common thread that runs through my teaching practice and academic research. Let me explain.

I didn't set out to be a teacher. My undergraduate degree was in Russian and French and I spent a year abroad in the city of Voronezh in what was then the Soviet Union. My Russian friends presumed I was planning to be a teacher, but although I didn't know what I wanted to do after graduating, I was certain it wouldn't be teaching. In the 1980s, the City of London seemed to be the place that all the bright young things were flocking to, so I followed them and started a career in banking. I soon realized that this was not for me and after an unhappy few years of office work, I returned to university to do a further degree in Soviet Studies. This was the early 1990s, and the Berlin Wall had just come down. I went to Kiev and was caught up in the feverish excitement and optimism that preceded national independence. Returning home, I wrote a thesis (for the now renamed Russian and East European Studies Master's degree) on Ukrainian national identity, thinking that this would take me into a career in journalism and maybe later back into academia.

But life led in another direction. A husband and a new baby took me to Tokyo instead for what we thought would be two years. A chance, I thought, to learn a new language and experience Japanese culture. But two years became three, then four, and then we just stayed. My Master's degree, despite its irrelevance to English teaching, opened the door to part-time work in Japanese universities. And I became a teacher, just like that.

Of course, I didn't have a teaching qualification and I didn't feel that I was really any good at it. I did have some experience of teaching English, as I'd worked for a language school when I was doing my Master's. But this did not prepare me in the least for the large classes of silent and apparently unmotivated students I encountered in Japan. How could I get them to talk? My language school techniques bombed. I started asking other teachers what worked for them. Many teachers, Japanese and non-Japanese, told me that the problem was the students. But I had a sneaking suspicion that I was the problem because I wasn't really a teacher.

A few years into teaching in Japan, I started a doctoral course in Applied Linguistics. I wanted to understand why Japanese students didn't talk and found that a few researchers had been studying the "problem" of Asian students. This gave me some

reassurance that I was onto something, but the more I read and the more I listened to other teachers and researchers, the more I realized that my – or rather, our teacher -- culture and identity could be a problem too. My informal talks with teachers turned into more official interviews, for which I adopted a research framework pioneered by Seidman (2006), and the concept of “positioning” (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999) suggested a way to analyse the narratives that I collected. The dissertation, “Teaching Positions: A Study of Identity in Japanese University Teachers of English” (2005) was passed with only minor amendments, but I didn’t feel confident that I’d got it right so I didn’t attempt to publish it as a monograph.

Instead, I joined the Learner Development Special Interest Group of the Japan Association for Language Teaching, where I soon found myself jointly in charge of a project to edit a book on learner autonomy (Irie & Stewart, 2012) and then another on collaborative learning (Ashwell, Miyahara, Paydon, & Stewart, 2014), as well as various other ventures. Perhaps the most meaningful one for me was a project in which a group of teachers and our students translated essays by children from a school that was completely destroyed in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami on the north-eastern coast of Japan, and from which all the children were evacuated safely thanks to the quick thinking of the school principal. We produced a website (<https://lookingback311.wixsite.com/start/reflections>) and presented our experience at a JALT conference together with one of the schoolchildren and her father (Magatake et al, 2014).



There have been other collaborative projects since then: a collaborative ethnography on academic publishing in this journal for one (Adamson et al, 2019). Elsewhere, it’s led to an interest in Inclusive Practitioner Research (see Hanks, 2019), especially in the development of my seminar and masters courses (Stewart, Croker, & Hanks, 2014) and involvement in the formation of a new research group which will hold its inaugural seminar at AILA 2020 in Groningen. These collaborations bring me in contact with other people who dislike traditional hierarchies, people who, like me, find the levelling of the power discrepancies between teacher and student, or researcher and subject, or editor and writer, to be more rewarding – intellectually, emotionally and ethically.

Recently, I've worked alone too, on a collection of career narratives by Filipino teachers in Japan. I arrived in Japan at a time when being British, white, and educated at a famous university was enough in itself to land me jobs at Japan's top universities. The Filipino teachers who have shared their stories with me have had quite a different experience. I am in awe of their energy and resilience and passion for teaching. Denied work in the Japanese education system until relatively recently, because they were not considered to be "native speakers", they have taught mainly young learners and elderly learners, in their homes, in language schools and in culture centres. Over the past decade, the attitude toward Filipinos has been changing and they are now working as classroom teachers and assistants (ALTs), at least in and around Tokyo where the society and social attitudes have changed the most. I'm still interested in teacher identity, but through my involvement with the Filipino teachers, I've moved away from the poststructuralist theories that see identity as discourse and have started exploring the (as I've now discovered) large body of work on identity as recognition (e.g., Taylor, 1999; Honneth, 2013). This is giving me a new language with which to talk about identity and the Filipinos' teaching lives, a language of emotions and ethics: prejudice and pride, self-respect and social justice.

References

- Adamson, J. L., Stewart, A., Smith, C., Lander, B., Fujimoto-Adamson, N., Martinez, J. & Masuda, M. (2019). Exploring the publication practices of Japan-based EFL scholars through Collaborative Autoethnography. *English Scholarship beyond Borders*, 5(1), 3-31. <http://www.englishscholarsbeyondborders.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Adamson-et-al-1.pdf>
- Ashwell, T., Miyahara, M. Paydon, S., & Stewart, A. (2014). *Collaborative learning in learner development*. Tokyo: JALT Publications (E-book).
- Hanks, J. (2019). From research-as-practice to exploratory practice-as-research in language teaching and beyond. *Language Teaching*, 52(2), 143-187. State-of-the-Art article.
- Hanks, J., Dawson, S., Salvi, A., & Stewart, A. (2016). Understanding from practice: Enhancing understanding through collegial working. In J. Hanks, *Exploratory Practice in language teaching: Puzzling about principles and practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harre, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1999) *Positioning Theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Honneth, A. (2013). *The I in we: Studies in the Theory of Recognition*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Irie, K., & Stewart, A. (2012). *Realizing autonomy: Practice and reflection in language education contexts*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Magatake, N., Musashi, K., Musashi, R., O'Neill, T., Porter, M. Kocel-Ross, C., & Stewart, A. (2015). Collaborative approaches to outreach. In P. Clements, A. Krause,

& H. Brown (Eds.), *JALT2014 Conference Proceedings* (93-101). Tokyo: Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Seidman, I. (2006) *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Stewart, A. (2005). *Teaching positions: A study of identity in English language teachers in Japanese higher education*. Unpublished dissertation. Institute of Education, University of London.

Stewart, A., & Ashwell, T. (2014). Clarifying terms. In T. Ashwell, M. Miyahara, S. Paydon & A. Stewart (Eds.), *Collaborative learning in learner development*. Tokyo: Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Stewart, A., Miyahara, M., Paydon, S., & Ashwell, T. (2014). Theoretical underpinnings of collaborative learning. In T. Ashwell, M. Miyahara, S. Paydon & A. Stewart (Eds.), *Collaborative learning in learner development*. Tokyo: Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Stewart, A., with Croker, R., & Hanks, J. (2014). Exploring the principles of Exploratory Practice: Quality of life or quality of learning? In A. Barfield & A. Minematsu (Eds.), *Learner development: Different cases, different interests*. Tokyo: Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Taylor, C. (1994). The politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (ed.) *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.