

Research Article

Teachers' Professional Identities in an Era of Testing Accountability in Japan: The Case of Teachers in Low-Performing Schools

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This paper presents tentative findings and discussions arising from an ongoing study on whether and how Japanese teachers' professional identities have shifted in the context of heightened testing accountability. After a brief description of policy development that led to the introduction of national testing in 2007, previous studies of teacher identity are reviewed. Having explored some ambiguity in the existent theories regarding the trajectories and consequences of identity work, the paper goes on to report and to analyse the cases of six teachers from three low-performing elementary schools in a northern Japanese administrative region. With the limited size and scope of the sample, the present research cannot claim generalisability, but it can still raise a number of theoretical issues for further investigation, such as the precariousness of teachers' strategies for sustaining their professional identities and the need for locating teachers' identity work in the micropolitics of schools.

1. Introduction

School is a place where children and teachers are forming their identities. Teachers enter the educational field with professional self-images obtained through their experiences as students; however, these images are continuously re-contextualised based on the teachers' experiences as professionals. In this process, teachers draw upon "resources" [1, page 66] or "traditions" [2, page 551] to make sense of their work environment, career prospects, work lives, and professional, and private selves. Beck [3], speaking about the English context, also described what Japan has witnessed, namely, the enactment of "a project of governmental professionalism" [3, page 133]—a systematic effort by the government and its agencies to promote certain conceptions of professionalism and to marginalise others. This authoritarian approach has been circumscribing the resources and traditions that Japanese teachers traditionally draw upon to form and reform their professional identities.

This paper examines whether and how Japanese teachers' professional identities have shifted in this context, particularly regarding heightened testing accountability. Japan has an international reputation for extensive testing. However,

except for a few years in the 1960s, it did not have national testing per se until 2007. In that year, national testing for sixth-grade elementary school students and third-grade junior high school students began. For the 2010 tests, the newly elected Democratic government scaled down the testing to 30% of schools. At the same time, however, according to a report by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology [4], 13,891 (61.3%) of the schools that were not selected took part voluntarily, boosting the total rate of participation to 73.2%¹. Many schools now set targets for students' performance based on the growing pressures of testing and assessment; these developments have affected teachers' work and subjectivity. It is possible that teachers struggle with blending their own beliefs and conceptions and the official requirements of education reform, with respect to relevant pedagogy and being a good teacher.

2. Policy Contexts

In recent years, more than ever, Japanese schooling has strictly focused on the nation's economic need for human resources in the era of globalised economies. For example,

in January 2005, the Japan Business Federation (*Nippon Keidanren*), a powerful representative of the business world, published its recommendations for the future direction of education [5]. It began by stating that “Education is the foundation for national prosperity. Particularly for us, as a nation with scarce national resources and energy, the top priority should be placed squarely on developing the human resources which will and can perform well in various fields, not only at home but abroad” (page 1). It went on to declare that this project would be realised via greater competition among teachers and schools. Particular recommendations were made based on the principles of *diversity, competition, and evaluation*.

In response, quasimarket reforms based on private business systems were introduced to enable what Gleeson and Gunter [6], in the English context, called the “centralised micro-management of education.” This involved sharply focused interventions in which accountability, developments, and outcomes became subject to management scrutiny at both the macro- and micro- educational levels. At the macro-educational level, the state began prescribing the operating environments for schools. At the micro-educational level, the government began to exhibit a growing interest in efficiency, effectiveness, and development within the national objectives [7].

In December 2006, the Fundamental Law of Education (*Kyoiku Kihon Ho*) was revised for the first time since its enactment in 1947. Under the new legal framework, economic demands can be more easily translated into national education objectives [8]. The revised Fundamental Law of Education demands that local boards of education set their education targets in the form of the Basic Plan for Educational Promotion, in accordance with the national objectives. Research shows that almost all local plans include targets for student achievement, which are measured by national and local tests [9, 10].

National testing began in 2007. The tests, which take place annually in April, cover mathematics and Japanese. Professional and public perceptions that academic standards in Japanese schools had declined were a catalyst, rather than the fundamental driver, for the neo-liberal education reforms [11]². Many schools now set targets for students’ performance and publish school development plans that elaborate on how the school is reaching its targets. Schools located in areas in which school-choice policies are implemented face greater pressures because they have to compete to attract students³.

One of the consequences of these policy developments is the intensification of work for teachers. Teachers have to complete massive amounts of paperwork, such as target-setting and self-review documents, which leave them with little time for lesson preparation and communication with students. This goal displacement can cause teachers to suffer emotional and existential disturbances, such as guilt, self-doubt, and alienation. Consider the following statement made by a teacher working in an urban school.

My days begin with making calls to some pupils to ask, ‘Have you had breakfast?’ or ‘Are you healthy

enough to come to school today?’ I come to school at seven, and making these calls is the first thing to do. It’s really hard work, but I don’t care because this is the work I have chosen. What I can’t put up with is the work imposed from above—a lot of paperwork and various tasks dictated by the administration. These things make me feel sorry. I should have done more for my children (quoted in [12, page 4]).

Many commentators have noted that Japan’s teachers have a self-image as humane professionals who are responsible for and committed to the holistic development of the children in their charge (e.g., [13]). The teachers believe that their personal and emotional relationships with children play an important role in carrying out effective teaching and learning [14]. In the current situation of work intensification, however, these self-images and professional beliefs are likely to be a cause of teachers becoming “crippled by conscience” [15, page 2].

If this line of reasoning is true, more recent comments pointing out a shift in teachers’ self-images away from those of fully committed professionals seem plausible [16, 17]. Yamada [18] asked why the burnout rate of Japan’s teachers had been declining since 2000 despite the continued intensification of work, suggesting that teachers were retreating from the troublesome concerns of their professional work to their private lives. In a similar vein, Hasegawa [19] pointed out that teachers were delimiting their professional responsibilities to maintain their professional identities. The author called this “a strategy of dualism,” which is “the way teachers try to avoid the overall collapse of their professional identities by seeing a part of the conditions and consequences of their work as being beyond their control” (page 118).

This situation, in which teachers are under increased pressure not only to work more but also to work in pursuit of administrative directives, has been well documented in other national contexts (e.g., [20–24]). Studies of teachers’ responses to difficulties with a focus on their identities have also been conducted, including the Japanese studies mentioned herein and others conducted in England [2, 25, 26].

3. Theories of Teachers’ Identity Work

As suggested previously herein, the introduction of national testing added a new layer to the already well-established system of testing-based accountability, a notable component of which is the entrance examination, with some observable consequences. Some local governments publish league tables of achievement to spur the efforts of local boards of education and schools to improve. Many schools now set targets for students’ performance. In these schools, teachers are required to make lesson development plans, which typically include more frequent use of drills and materials prepared especially for the tests, to ensure the attainment of the target scores. This has intensified teachers’ workloads and left them with less professional autonomy concerning their teaching content and pedagogy.

It is interesting to explore how teachers feel about and respond to the current state of testing accountability. This paper focuses on whether and how teachers' professional identities have shifted in response to this new set of expectations.

The works mentioned at the end of the previous section [2, 25, 26] are significant regarding the impact of education reform on teachers' identities. Particular attention should be paid to the concept of "identity work," defined as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of their self-concept" ([27, page 1348], cited in [26, page 98]). Woods and Jeffrey [26] use this concept to explore how English primary-school teachers negotiate new identities within their experiences of school inspection by the Office for Standards in Education. School inspections, which are an essential part of the National Curriculum and Testing regime in England, pressured teachers to abandon or at least to modify their value systems in many ways.

This created serious dilemmas for the teachers. Drawing on the formulation by [28] of four major dilemmas that the self typically confronts in late modernity, Woods and Jeffrey [26] elaborated on the situation in England in four areas: (1) the creation of a fragmented self, as it became difficult for the individual to retain former values; (2) an assault on teacher autonomy; (3) a heightened sense of uncertainty about one's abilities, aims, relationships, and commitment to teaching; (4) commoditisation of personal relationships. Whereas some teachers could simply embrace the dilemmas, others found it difficult to negotiate the inconsistencies between their self-concepts and the newly assigned identities.

Woods and Jeffrey [26] found that the latter type of teachers responded in one of two ways: self-positioning (through refusal and self-assertion) and separation of the self from what they were required to do and be. Self-positioning was concerned with "a strong resolve to maintain the Plowden self-identity⁴, rejecting the new assigned social identity" (page 99). In the separation-of-self strategy, teachers developed a "new personal identity to meet the ostensible requirements (although not the spirit) of the new social identity, while reserving and cultivating what were to them more important aspects of the self for their private life outside the teacher role" (page 100). In this paper, this is referred to as the "strategy of separatism."

This analysis, particularly concerning the strategy of separatism, echoes what Yamada [18] and Hasegawa [19] found in Japan. It is also found that teachers in Japan enact the kinds of identity work described by Woods and Jeffrey [26], as will be reported herein. However, these studies are somewhat ambiguous regarding the trajectories and consequences of the identity work. First, it is not certain how long and under what conditions such strategies can work successfully. Woods and Jeffrey [26] noted that "game-playing" (i.e., putting on an act to meet expectations), one of the strategies that teachers employ to sustain their professional selves, cannot always solve their dilemmas: "Game-playing can leave teachers ambivalent about their self-identity. In the face of authority and loss of trust, uncertainty occurs and creates yet another dilemma for teachers" (pages 102-103). Woods and

Jeffrey suggest that the strategy could only be a stopgap: it could intensify, rather than relieve, teachers' professional and existential anxieties. However, they did not expand further on this idea.

The strategy of separatism involves a kind of instrumentalism that assumes it is possible, if not easy, to keep intact one's *interior* self by detaching it from one's *exterior* self. However, in reality, the exterior can affect and modify the interior and even cause it to decay. Taylor [29], an American philosopher, critiqued instrumentalism when he warned that our inner nature is "in danger of being lost, partly through the pressures toward outward conformity, *but also because in taking an instrumental stance toward [ourselves, we] may have lost the capacity to listen to [our] inner voice*" (page 30, italics mine). It has been widely recognised that teaching, as a profession, demands a great deal of personal investment (e.g., [30, 31]). Considering this, it can hardly be assumed that efforts to differentiate what a teacher believes or values from what she or he is required to do as a professional are guaranteed to succeed in sustaining the integrated self.

The conceptions of *exterior* and *interior* selves, as used by Taylor [29], can apply to the investigation of the strategy of separatism, suggesting that the former can undermine the latter in the process of teachers' identity work. Furthermore, *exterior* can be considered roughly equivalent to *functional* and *interior* to *attitudinal* in the context of teacher development explicated by Evans [32]. By functional development, Evans means *procedural* and *productive* changes (i.e., changes concerning what and/or how much teachers produce or do at work). By attitudinal development, she means *intellectual* (i.e., concerning teachers' thinking, thought processes, and ideas) and *motivational* changes. She argues that placing too much emphasis on the functional development of teachers and paying too little attention to their attitudinal development, as is applicable to education reform in the UK, is "destined for only partial success" (page 31). She also contends that functional, but not attitudinal, development can be attained by imposition. Her main point is that educational reformers, if they wish to succeed, need to consider and to incorporate the diverse professional (i.e., attitudinal, ideological, intellectual, and epistemological) orientations of individual teachers into a new type of professionalism. This point is mostly agreeable, yet the author's distinction between functional and attitudinal developments seems basically problematic. Functional (i.e., exterior) changes may lead to attitudinal (i.e., interior) changes. This is what performativity, the currently dominant policy technology, is about; performativity is one of the "mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it means to be a teacher, the technologies of reform produce new kinds of teacher subjects" ([20, page 217], quoted in [33, page 226]).

In addition, the strategies of separatism and dualism can reinforce the current system of accountability, which requires that the directives to improve student performance, such as ability grouping and frequent use of drills and particular materials in preparation for tests, be conducted. Thus, the pursuit of teachers' professional identities in this way can constrain the possibilities of "resistance with good sense"

[34] and transforming the power relations embedded in the current system of accountability, therefore, unintentionally assisting the enactment of “a project of governmental professionalism” [3].

The previous literature on teachers’ identity work has not gone far enough in exploring these problems. The central aim of this paper is to suggest that future research needs to pay more attention to the precariousness of identity work.

4. Methods

This paper is speculative in nature, albeit with some empirical illustrations. This occurs mainly because it is part of a broader study, currently in progress, concerning teachers’ responses to national testing. The data collected for the paper are limited in scope and depth. Consequently, the analysis and discussion are tentative, but still they should be able to raise significant theoretical questions for further investigation.

The empirical data for this paper are drawn mainly from interviews with six teachers from three elementary schools in a northern Japanese administrative region. (In the next section, the hyphenated numbers that appear after the interview quotes identify schools and individuals.) This region was selected because it did not perform well in the national testing conducted in April 2010. The prefectural board that oversees the region’s education had been concerned with its low standing in the national testing results and had exhorted the local boards of education and schools to make every effort to improve their performance. However, the results of the 2010 national testing showed that elementary and junior high schools ranked near the bottom in the national league table organised by prefecture. Detailed analysis showed that some regions improved but others did not (“Gakute seitoritsu kojo chiiki mo [Some regions perform better in national testing],” *The Daily North*, January 13, 2011). The prefectural board of education decided to put more pressure on the schools in the regions that lagged behind. In December 2010, one of the schools in which I conducted the interviews had a special visit by an advisory officer from the prefectural board of education. The stated purpose of the visit was to discuss with the school staff the measures being taken to improve the school’s performance. During the discussion, the advisory officer proposed that the school introduces ability groupings and that teachers conduct tests in preparation for the national testing. Thus, the teachers in the region, particularly those in the school visited by the advisory officer, were under especially strong pressure regarding testing accountability. The effects of the accountability pressures on their professional identities, a focus of this paper, should be clearly discernible.

Foreseeing difficulties in obtaining the local education board’s official permission to conduct this research in the region’s schools, I asked my acquaintance, a teacher who was also working in a school in the region, to introduce me to possible interviewees. In response, the teacher nominated six teachers from three schools, including the school visited by the advisory officer, as mentioned herein; they all agreed

to participate in the study. It should be noted that I had not met any of them previously. I began by asking the interviewees how they felt about testing accountability and how it had affected their work and professional beliefs. Later, I allowed them to control the flow of the interview. Each interview lasted at least 30 minutes. All of the interviewees agreed that their interviews could be audiorecorded and then transcribed for analysis. I have applied methods of theoretical comparison [35] in analysing the interview data. As the analysis was guided by my theoretical perspective of teachers’ identity work, I focused on emergent themes about the nature, conditions, and consequences of the teachers’ responses to testing accountability.

5. Japanese Teachers’ Shifting Professional Identities

5.1. Self-Positioning and the Strategy of Dualism. All the teachers I interviewed found themselves under increasing pressure to improve the national testing results of their students. They understood that the region was “targeted” (teacher 2-1) by the prefectural board of education. In addition to the school that had received the special visit, other schools have decided to introduce tests created especially to prepare students for the national testing. Some teachers were concerned about sanctions threatened by the prefectural board of education: “Our head teacher said, ‘If we don’t do this [the tests], the board may withdraw the purpose-based additional distribution of teaching staff that we are now receiving.’ I said to him, ‘That is a threat.’ He replied, ‘I think so, too’” (teacher 2-1). The point is not whether the board will actually impose sanctions against disobedient schools. The board’s financial and personnel authority enables it to successfully persuade schools to adopt the measures that it proposes will yield higher test results.

The preparatory tests, like the national tests, cover Japanese and mathematics. The participating schools are ranked according to their results; the actual results, however, are not published. However, when I asked the teachers about the impact of the tests on their practices and professional beliefs, their responses were not as serious as I had expected. This was mainly because they doubted the relevance of the tests. One teacher said:

To be frank, the tests are not the real tests. They cannot measure our children’s achievement or abilities. We believe that the tests are not worth administering. Yet the board insists on us administering them, so we do. We are sorry for the time spent on the tests, but it’s a kind of posturing. If we administer the tests, it’s OK. We still do the real teaching as we have been doing (teacher 3-1).

This teacher was sensitive to the low achievement of her students. By “the real teaching,” she meant the entire school’s commitment to raising academic achievement levels. She believed that there are roughly two kinds of achievement—visible and invisible. Her understanding was that the visible achievement measured by these particular tests does not

reflect the overall development of children, echoing the self-image of a teacher as being a professional committed to the holistic ideal of education. Therefore, to the extent that this teacher believes she is helping children realise their potential and strengthen their abilities, she does not have to worry about the test results; she disregards the national testing results in the same way. Thus, she appeared to be able to keep her professional beliefs mostly intact. The strength of her professional beliefs seemed to be a main factor that made this self-positioning possible.

The other teachers, who also appeared to maintain their professional identities, hinted at different reasons why they were able to do so. Like the teacher mentioned earlier herein, they regarded their students' academic achievement as a serious issue; however, these teachers emphasised students' family backgrounds and local economic conditions as causes of the problem.

I do not think that the main reason for this [children's low achievement] has to do with us. Many students here come from one-parent families. A third of my class last year was composed of such students. This area has many publicly built houses; young mothers come back here with their children after divorce. Generally, these parents have difficulty making their living and they cannot pay much attention to their children's work (teacher 3-2).

This area has been economically depressed for a long time. Its main industries are fishery and agriculture, but production has been decreasing because of the exhaustion of natural resources and also [because of] official regulations. We have been suffering from high unemployment rates. Many people have left for jobs. It is difficult to motivate our children to learn in this situation (teacher 1-1).

These teachers also responded to the pressures of raising academic standards: "I have my students do drills more frequently than before, although I doubt the effectiveness [of this strategy]" (teacher 3-2). At the same time, however, these teachers coped with the pressure by delimiting their professional responsibilities: they regarded family backgrounds and local economic conditions as the causes of their students' low academic achievement. Thus, these teachers were developing a narrower self-concept of what they should and can do, employing the strategy of dualism [19] with apparent success.

5.2. Are Professional Identities Really Sustained? However, not all the teachers I interviewed could safely preserve their professional identities. A teacher in the school that was visited by the advisory officer seemed to have felt stronger pressure: "I was extremely nervous when I heard the news because I thought that they would certainly come to find fault with my teaching" (teacher 1-2). The school has since introduced ability-based groupings and preparatory testing to prepare students for the nationwide testing, as suggested by the prefectural board of education. The school

went further, modifying its assessment schemes so it could compare its students' level of achievement in Japanese and mathematics with national scores on a more continuous basis. This particular change was voluntarily proposed from within the school.

Nevertheless, the teacher who felt so anxious about the visit said the experience was not as threatening as he had feared. The visit took place during the winter break, so the advisory officer did not observe any classes. The teacher was most worried about the changes he perceived in the wake of the visit:

Before the visit, we worked individually in a sense. I suppose we shared a view of children as whole persons. We all understood the importance of helping children to maximize their potential. We had the same aim but we worked in different ways that seemed to lead to the same place. What is happening now? We are more consistent in terms of content and method of teaching, but I am afraid that we have rather different conceptions of children's learning and our teaching (teacher 1-2).

He observed a growing consistency in the means of teaching used by his colleagues. This could mean that what mattered for the teachers was ostensible observance; they did not commit themselves to the end of raising students' test scores. Here, instrumentalism comes in and seems to work successfully. However, in reality, more consistent use of specific means makes teachers more aware of the particular ends associated with those means. The teacher's remarks concerning different conceptions of teaching and learning implied that some teachers had been modifying their professional beliefs to align with the practices. When I asked, "Do you mean that some teachers believed in a holistic view of education but now they do not?", he replied, "Yes, in my observation, some colleagues are devoting themselves to raising the scores" (teacher 1-2).

It is difficult for teachers to adhere to their original ends if the means squarely contradict those ends. Quite possibly, the success of separating means from ends, with the goal of preserving the latter, depends on how much and how stringently a teacher is required to perform the means. If little room is left for doing "the real teaching" and there is a threat of sanctions for disobedience, self-positioning and the strategy of separatism may break down.

The teacher also noticed a related change in the relationships between his colleagues:

We used to talk more about our teaching and children in class, both the good and bad things. Our ways of teaching were different, but nonetheless, we talked a lot to each other. Perhaps we enjoyed talking to each other because our ways of teaching were different. Now we talk less in the staff room. We use more of the same materials, tests, and methods. This makes us aware of the requirement of raising the scores. This also makes our relations in the staff room more strained than last year (teacher 1-2).

Thus, heightened awareness of the imperative of raising students' test scores had been affecting staff relations.

Recently, one teacher took a leave of absence from the school where these strained relationships had been felt. The reason he gave to his colleagues was that he was concerned about his health. However, another teacher from the school doubted this, saying, "He once told me that he became a teacher because he wanted to develop positive personal relationships with children. However, over these six months, he has been working hard at raising his students' scores. He seemed to lose confidence in what he really wants to do" (teacher 1–3). The interviewee suggested that serious tensions between what the teacher wanted to do (i.e., his self-concept) and what he was required to be and do (i.e., his assigned identity) led to his breakdown.

In the process of meeting the outward requirements of accountability, this teacher seemed to have been unable to share his ambivalence and anxiety with his colleagues. Good relationships between colleagues help teachers deal with professional and emotional crises [36]. Likewise, strained relationships can worsen crises. Furthermore, teachers' suffering is not caused by outwardly imposed requirements per se but by strained relationships with their colleagues. This suggests that one of the conditions for the success of the strategy of dualism is a mutually caring relationship among colleagues. However, testing accountability can strain these relationships because it involves comparing and judging teachers both explicitly and implicitly.

The teacher who left the school did not or could not delimit his professional responsibilities, presumably because he believed that raising students' test scores was part, if not the whole, of his profession. Consequently, he could not escape from the "responsibilisation" that compelled the teachers to "conduct themselves in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of actions" ([37, page 29], quoted in [38, page 30] (in this case, to commit themselves to the measures intended to produce higher test scores)). On the other hand, some of the teachers I interviewed apparently succeeded in sustaining their professional identities by means of the dualism strategy. However, this strategy is also precarious; its success depends on the strength of the outward accountability requirements and the existence of caring relationships. If these teachers were placed under stronger pressures or in more strained relationships, they would no longer be able to employ this strategy.

6. Discussions and Conclusion

This paper has thus far presented a description of the identity work conducted by a small number of teachers under the pressure of raising students' scores in Japan's national testing and other preparatory tests. At first glance, some of the teachers succeeded in keeping their professional identities intact, by delimiting their professional responsibilities—regarding the educational consequences (i.e., children's low achievement) of family backgrounds and local economic conditions as being beyond their control—or by adhering to their educational beliefs and disregarding the outer

requirements. However, although further investigation is needed, these successes regarding the teachers' identity work could be short lived, as illustrated by the teacher who took a leave of absence from his school. These strategies induce the kind of instrumentalism that can affect, modify, and even displace the end result of teaching, the core of their professional identity. The separatism and dualism strategies in teachers' identity work create a "new social identity" [26, page 100], but this identity is constructed mainly, if not entirely, from "resources managed by the state: centring resources" [1, page 66]. With fewer resources embedded in local knowledge and professional autonomy, this new identity can assume only a peripheral position in education reform.

A related issue worth examining is the impact of testing accountability on teachers' school-based research known as lesson study (*jugyo kenkyu*). Basically, lesson study proceeds as "a collaborative process of preparing lesson plans, conducting and observing lessons, checking and evaluating teaching, reflecting on practice, and replanning" [39, page 172]. Lesson study has been strongly established in the professional culture in Japanese schools; as such, it represents the local resources on which Japanese teachers have been able to draw to develop professional autonomy and to construct their self-concepts within the teaching profession [39]. It has been observed that lesson study not only helps Japanese teachers to enhance knowledge and skills but also helps them to bring up, discuss, and explore conflicting ideas regarding educational goals [40, 41]. Originally created in Japan, lesson study has now spread outside the country as a new rationale for improvement of teaching and learning. In the USA, recent research [42] showed that lesson study can strengthen professional norms, as illustrated by "teachers' expressions of accountability to colleagues and students, rather than to external mandates" (page 297) or "shifting from talking about professional leaning as fulfilling someone else's requirements ('what we have to do') to designing a lesson with maximum benefit for students" (page 298). Thus, it can be argued that practices of lesson study help teachers to enact "self-positioning" [26] or "resistance with good sense" [34] against the pressures of testing accountability. However, as suggested previously herein, testing accountability can promote intensification of teachers' work and affect staff relations, which will eventually undermine the voluntary and collaborative basis of lesson study. Regrettably, the present research did not examine the way testing accountability impacts lesson study or the way lesson study mediates teachers' identity work. Any further research should seriously consider this issue⁵.

Based on this research, another point can be raised. Even if testing accountability does not immediately impact teachers' professional identities, it can still destabilise their professional selves through the changes in relationships that it causes. Previous literature on teachers' identity work seems to assume that teachers *individually* resist, appropriate, or comply with the directives of education reform. In other words, they fail to regard relationships among teachers or micro-politics in the school as significant conditions for their identity work. However, one of the cases reported

herein suggests that strained relationships, brought about by the more consistent use of content and pedagogy focused on the tests, with a resulting lessening of communication among colleagues, contributed to one teacher's breakdown. One of my previous papers described mutually policing, as opposed to caring, relationships in which teachers' identities were being reworked under the strong pressures of testing accountability [43]. In light of these observations, it may be that the cases reported herein, in which teachers were apparently successful in sustaining their professional identities, resulted from better relationships rather than the strategies of dualism. To further investigate the question of whether and how Japanese teachers' professional identities are shifting in the context of heightened testing accountability, researchers need to view the issue through a theoretical perspective that locates teachers' identity work in the micro-politics of schools.

Overall, given its small sample of teachers, the present research has limitations in terms of generalisability. Furthermore, all the teachers sampled worked in schools identified as badly performing and in need of raising students' test scores; I intentionally selected those schools. The theoretical themes arising from the present research need to be explored with a wider sample, which should include teachers in schools with higher scores on standardised testing. In those schools, do teachers still feel the pressures of accountability and conduct identity work in the same ways? Even in the present sample, many differences were observed in terms of teachers' responses to the outer requirements of raising students' academic standards. One of the teachers seemed to be able to keep her professional beliefs mostly intact. Other teachers also apparently succeeded by employing the strategy of separatism, but one teacher broke down under the pressures of testing accountability. A number of factors have been suggested as the reasons for the variety of responses, including the strength of personal beliefs, the (perceived) stringency of accountability, and the state of staff relationships. These possible explanations need to be further investigated in different contexts.

Endnotes

1. Due to the March 11 earthquake and tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear plant accident that followed, the 2011 national testing was first postponed and then cancelled. However, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology announced that it would distribute the testing papers to local boards of education and schools to help them ensure their development and evaluation cycles [44].
2. Many traced this phenomenon back to 2002, when textbook content was reduced 30% and the school week was shortened from six days to five. This policy change, called *yutori kyoiku* (relaxed education), was launched in response to problems, such as bullying, physical attacks on peers and school staff, school phobia, and apathy and suicides among children and youths, that were attributed to the competitive and stressful

nature of Japanese schooling. However, this change was soon retracted amidst public concerns about declining academic standards.

3. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, as of May 2008, 14.2% of local boards of education had implemented school-choice systems for elementary schools, and another 13.9% had done so for junior high schools [45]. Rates vary across the nation, depending on local education board policies, the levels of schooling involved, and the degree of urbanisation in the area. Nineteen of the 23 wards in Tokyo allow parents to choose their child's junior high school; 13 do so for elementary schools.
4. The authors defined the Plowden identity as consisting of humanism and vocationalism (i.e., a missionary commitment to teaching) and providing teachers with the basis for an integrated self.
5. The author would like to thank an anonymous referee for drawing attention to the significance of lesson study for the theme of the present research.

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