

*Erkki T. Lassila*

TENSIONS IN  
THE RELATIONSHIPS

EXPLORING JAPANESE BEGINNING  
TEACHERS' STORIES

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**TENSIONS IN THE RELATIONSHIPS**

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### ***Abstract***

This research examines stories told by beginning teachers' and asks *what kinds of tensions characterise their work?* In earlier research tensions have been seen as personal, but here the emphasis is on how they are embedded and born in the interaction between the teachers and the relational and micropolitical environments of their schools. Tensions refer to situations, where teachers do not know how to act correctly, when two or more values or views conflict and several possible justifiable courses for action exist. Tensions are not emotions, but they are often accompanied by a strong emotional experiences. Tensions are often seen just as problems, but they can also contribute to professional growth.

The empirical part is based on the basic view in narrative research, where telling stories is understood as a means through which people make sense of themselves and the world around them. The main research material are stories produced in interviews with sixteen (16) Japanese beginning teachers. For one sub-study, interviews with seven (7) senior teachers and field notes in one junior high school were also produced. In the analysis, holistic reading of individual stories, multi-voiced analysis of one narrative environment and a more traditional thematic analysis were utilised.

The results show how the tensions in beginning teachers' work are connected to their ideals on being a good teacher conflicting with expectations in the micropolitical environment of the schools. As a junior, the beginning teacher is expected to assume an obedient position with their seniors. The results also show how the views on being a good teacher emphasize putting common interests and responsibilities over personal matters. By acting against the expectations, the beginning teacher may risk harming the very important collegial relationships and therefore often decides to give up his or her ideals. The tensions are therefore born from the teacher having to give up his or her ideals and assuming opposing views.

Learning how to deal and live with these relational and micropolitical tensions is connected to teacher well-being and attrition. Therefore, it is recommendable that tensions are paid sufficient attention to in both teacher education and in the schools.

**Keywords:** beginning teachers, educational relationships, emotions, Japan, micropolitical environment, narrative research, tensions



## **Lassila, Erkki T., Jännitteitä suhteissa. Aloittelevien japanilaisten opettajien tarinoiden äärellä**

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### ***Tiivistelmä***

Tutkimukseni tarkastelee aloittelevien opettajien tarinoita ja vastaa kysymykseen: *millaiset jännitteet luonnehtivat heidän työtään?* Aiemmassa tutkimuksessa jännitteitä on pidetty henkilökohtaisina, mutta tässä tutkimuksessa painotetaan sitä, kuinka ne kietoutuvat ja syntyvät opettajien ja heidän koulujensa sosiaalisen ja mikropoliittisen ympäristön välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa. Jännitteet viittaavat tilanteisiin, joissa opettajat eivät tiedä miten toimia, kun erilaiset arvot ja näkemykset ovat ristiriidassa ja perusteltuja toimintatapoja on useita. Jännitteet eivät ole tunteita, mutta niihin liittyy usein voimakkaita tunnekokemuksia. Usein niitä pidetään vain ongelmina, mutta ne voivat myös olla lähtökohtana ammatilliselle kasvulle.

Tutkimuksen empiirinen osa rakentuu kerronnallisen tutkimuksen perusajatukselle tarinoiden kerronnasta kertojan tapana rakentaa ymmärrystä itsestä ja ympäröivästä maailmasta. Pääaineistona ovat kuudentoista (16) japanilaisen aloittelevan opettajan kanssa haastatteluissa tuotetut tarinat. Yhtä osatutkimusta varten myös haastateltiin seitsemää (7) kokenutta opettajaa sekä tuotettiin kenttämuistiinpanoja eräällä yläasteella. Analyysissä käytettiin niin holistista lukutapaa, moniäänistä kerronnallisen ympäristön analyysia kuin perinteistä temaattista sisällönanalyysäkin.

Tulokset osoittavat aloittelevien opettajien työn jännitteiden liittyvän siihen, kuinka heidän ihanteensa hyvästä opettajuudesta kohtaavat koulun mikropoliittisessa ympäristössä näiden ihanteiden kanssa vastakkaisia odotuksia. Aloittelevan opettajan oletetaan ottavan juniorina alisteisen aseman suhteessa senioreihin. Tulokset osoittavat myös, että näkemyksissä hyvästä opettajasta korostuu yhteisten velvoitteiden asettaminen opettajan henkilökohtaisten näkemysten edelle. Toimimalla näitä odotuksia vastaan aloitteleva opettaja saattaisi vaarantaa työn kannalta tärkeitä kollegasuhteita ja päätyy siksi usein luopumaan ihanteistaan. Tällöin jännite syntyy siitä, että aloitteleva opettaja joutuu ihanteidensa sijaan omaksumaan niiden vastaisia näkemyksiä.

Näiden jännitteiden kanssa eläminen ja käsitteleminen kietoutuvat niin opettajien hyvinvointiin kuin työssä pysymiseen. Tämän vuoksi niihin tulisi kiinnittää riittävästi huomiota sekä opettajankoulutuksessa että työelämässä.

*Asiasanat:* aloittelevat opettajat, Japani, jännitteet, kasvatukselliset suhteet, kerronnallinen tutkimus, mikropoliitiikka, tunteet





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and all every person we meet moves us in different ways. We may not remember all of them vividly, but they are nonetheless important. So, for those not named here, accept my humble gratitude. Kiitos, thank you and どうもありがとうございました!

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Oulu, Joulukuu 2016

Erkki T. Lassila



## List of original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications, which are referred throughout the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Lassila E & Uitto M (2016) The tensions between the ideal and experienced: Teacher-student relationships in stories told by beginning Japanese teachers. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 24(2): 205–219.
- II Lassila E, Uitto M & Estola E (Manuscript) Relationship tensions among beginning and senior teachers.
- III Lassila E, Timonen V, Uitto M, Estola E (In press) Storied emotional distances in the relationships between beginning teachers and school principals. *British Journal of Educational Research*.



# Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	
<b>Tiivistelmä</b>	
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>List of original publications</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>15</b>
1.1 Brief overview of what is about to come and why this research matters.....	17
1.2 The research question.....	20
<b>2 Placing the research on a theoretical and methodological landscape</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Who are beginning teachers and why study their work?.....	21
2.2 The school as a micropolitical environment .....	24
2.3 Narrative lenses.....	26
2.4 Contextualising the beginning teachers' work in Japan .....	29
2.4.1 Teacher's role and its social meaning .....	29
2.4.2 Teacher education, professional growth and progression .....	31
2.4.3 Japanese teaching culture and organisational style of the schools.....	34
<b>3 Tensions</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1 Definition of tension and an explanation of their connection to broader narratives.....	39
3.2 Connections to power relationships .....	43
3.3 Cultural and social values and norms as broader narratives in Japan .....	45
3.4 Emotional dimension of tensions .....	47
3.4.1 What are emotions?.....	48
3.4.2 Emotional rules and broader narratives .....	49
<b>4 The research process</b>	<b>51</b>
4.1 Production of the research material.....	51
4.2 The interviews.....	51
4.2.1 Getting into the field – involvement with the K-School.....	56
4.3 Working with three languages – notes on transcription and interpretation .....	59
4.4 The analysis .....	64

4.5 Ethical considerations .....	66
<b>5 The articles</b>	<b>69</b>
5.1 The tensions between the ideal and experienced: teacher–student relationships in stories told by beginning Japanese teachers.....	69
5.2 Relationship tensions among beginning and senior teachers .....	70
5.3 Storied emotional distances in the relationships between beginning teachers and school principals.....	72
<b>6 Main results of the research</b>	<b>75</b>
6.1 A methodologically guided new understanding of tensions.....	75
6.2 Tensions originating from the positions of junior and senior in the collegial relationships.....	76
6.3 Tensions originating from the views on being a good (beginning) teacher in the teacher community.....	80
<b>7 Evaluation of the research</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>8 Discussion and implications</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Original publications</b>	<b>105</b>



# 1 Introduction

At this point I imagine that many of you are wondering, who is Erkki and why is he, as a Finnish researcher, doing research on Japanese teachers? How on earth is he qualified to do something as bold as conducting research in Japanese, interviewing teachers and spending significant amounts of time in the field? Why did he decide to ask for stories and conduct narrative interviews instead of choosing a less challenging means of approaching the research topic? Rest assured that these and many other questions will be answered along the way. First, I will introduce my own story as a foreign researcher entering the field of Japanese education and building relationships with its members.

In any tradition, it is important for the researcher to describe him/herself and the research (s)he has carried out, because who you are and where you come from influences your values and beliefs and, these, together with one's unique life history, are inseparable from the way you conduct research (Creswell 2007). This research is carried out within the narrative research tradition where the researcher's subjectivity and active involvement are recognised as crucial parts of the research (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007, Spector-Mersel 2010a).

Even though I had no way of knowing it back then, the genesis of this research stretches all the way back to my first year as an undergraduate student and the moment I was introduced to Japanese culture and language through its popular visual media, manga and anime. Almost instantly I was taken in by their magic. Steadily, this new relationship grew into deeper fascination with the Japanese culture, the Japanese people and their language, leading me through many twists to the point where I am sitting today, writing this introduction. Soon after the first introduction to Japanese culture, I found myself in Japanese language classes practicing the fascinating writing system and learning about a communication culture that was greatly different from the one I had been brought up in. I wanted to experience it myself, and before I knew it, I was on my way for a student exchange year in Hokkaido University.

The year spent in Sapporo between 2007 and 2008 was the initial spark that ignited my interest in studying Japanese teachers' work, even though I did not realise it until about a year after returning home to Finland. When choosing a topic for my bachelor's thesis I started to think about ways to combine my interest in Japanese culture with my teaching curriculum and ended up conducting a small study on differences and similarities between the teaching profession in Finland and Japan based on existing literature (Lassila 2010). My inquisitive spirit had been

awakened. In my master's thesis, I wanted to learn what the teachers thought and how they felt about their own work. I had 10 Japanese teachers from various parts of Japan write to me about their journey to become teachers and what the most impactful or impressive things in their daily work were. The central theme among all of the stories was the significance of meaningful relationships with stakeholders within their sphere – students, parents and colleagues – and the various emotional entanglements that are inherent in these relationships. But the contrasting stories of two very enthusiastic teachers, one of whom worked in an environment in which colleagues shared her views on education, and the other teacher, who worked in an environment in which co-workers did not share his passion, caught my attention. While the sense of a calling to teaching was strong in both educators, ultimately the calling itself was not strong enough to carry through the difficult times without a supportive environment; the teacher left the profession. However, the teacher in the more amicable environment was able to persevere through challenging times in her employment as a teacher (Lassila 2011).

Though the theme of my bachelor's and master's theses interested me greatly, and I enjoyed the process, I had been a somewhat reluctant writer and, initially, I did not plan to pursue a research career. I was on my way to becoming an elementary-level teacher. Had I not been greatly encouraged by my master's thesis supervisor, Eila Estola, who ultimately also became the principal supervisor for the dissertation, I would have not applied for the doctoral program, made a second trip to Japan (spoiler alert!), and you would not be reading this. After being accepted into the doctoral program, I spent the first year working as a research-assistant in a project called 'Relations' led by Minna Uitto, which focussed on emotional narration as a part of student teachers' peer-group activity. At the same time, I fleshed out my research plan, applied for funding and made preparations for the trip to Japan for the empirical part of my research.

In my doctoral research, I wanted to investigate further the connections among relationships, emotions and the school as a micropolitical environment; however, I did not have a clearly formulated research question in the beginning. I had a general interest on a given phenomenon or experience, enters the field and investigates research material with an open, inquiring mind. This process often allows the research question to naturally bubble up as the researcher's understanding increases (Caine *et al.* 2013). My dissertation started as a stand-alone inquiry into the work of Japanese teachers. But because both of my supervisors were part of an international research project titled 'Disentangling the Emotional Dimension in Beginning Teachers' Work' (EMOT), and because my own interest was already

fixed on the emotional and relational aspects of teaching, I shifted my own research focus specifically to beginning Japanese teachers and set my course for the Japanese field. Without further ado, I invite you, my dear reader, to a suspenseful journey, an exploration of various tensions found in the world of beginning teachers in Japan! Let's dive in!

## **1.1 Brief overview of what is about to come and why this research matters**

This thesis is a narrative about the experiences of beginning teachers in the micropolitical environments of their schools, where the teachers must establish themselves in a milieu of existing relationships with entangled emotions. This research is grounded on the understanding that teaching is a situated practice, meaning that it always happens in a particular context and that it is conditioned by this context in many ways. Through his extensive research on teachers and their work, Geert Kelchtermans has pointed out that especially within research there is a tendency for institutional and organisational contexts to get ignored and, as a result, teachers' work to get generalised and depoliticised when, in reality, it is anything but (Kelchtermans 2016, Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). Heeding this advice, I have tried to be attentive to the different dimensions of the school as a micropolitical environment that influence the relationships beginning teachers have in their work. Colleagues form the meaningful core and the social context for the teaching profession (Hargreaves 1998) and, especially in Japan, the role of colleagues is essential because a teacher's professional growth and running the schools is understood as a cooperative undertaking (Ahn 2014, Shimahara 2002). Throughout the research, the role of colleagues comes out as key to understanding beginning teachers' relationships and workplace tensions. However, in the end, colleagues are just one dimension of the environment that defines teachers' work. There is also a need to address other dimensions and in this research they are conceptualised as broader narratives.

Broader narratives, in this research are understood to be made up of ideals, conceptualisations, norms, beliefs and so on, particularly when it comes to what good teaching is, what a good beginning teacher is like, and how social interaction among members of the culture should take place. Through broader narratives, we can address the cultural, social and historical dimensions that impact the workplace and contribute to the tensions. These dimensions became observable when the school is approached as a micropolitical environment. In this research, emotional

rules that are considered norms in the schools are also understood as broader narratives, that give rise to tensions.

As the educational relationships are never simple and, because in any situation, individual teachers seldom have identical beliefs, wishes, ambitions, and goals, there is always potential for tensions to appear. In this research, “tensions” refers to situations in the micropolitical environment of a school where due to conflicting values and commitments. beginning teachers may have to take an unwanted stance due to broader narratives important to the schools. In these situations, beginning teachers or sometimes even teachers new to the school typically have no easily identified means for rectifying the situation, and they must negotiate their position carefully. I argue that the various relationships with colleagues within the micropolitical environment of the school are connected to the tensions that have their origin in broader narrative on a macro level (society).

The ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points of this research are in the narrative research tradition, where telling stories is understood as a fundamental way for people to make sense of themselves, their lives and the world around them (Riessman 2008). Stories represent the meaning-carrying symbolic forms that Geertz (1973) emphasises as keys to finding out how people understand and define themselves as persons, as it is these symbolic forms that they use to represent this understanding to themselves and to others. By working on teachers’ personal stories, I am following the example set by other researchers who have found such stories to be a good way to understand teachers’ experiences, identities and nature of their professional knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Elbaz-Luwisch 2005, Estola 2003, Kelchtermans 2009, Uitto 2011). This also constitutes the methodological foundation for my research. My research adds a less explored perspective of beginning teachers in Japan to the growing body of narrative research on teachers’ work. By conducting analysis using a diverse array of narrative methods, my research highlights the relational nature of tensions and makes a theoretical opening by looking at how the tensions appear in the schools’ micropolitical environments.

Previous research written in English about Japanese education does exist but, according to Takayama (2011), the majority is disconnected from theoretical discussions in wider scholarly communities and form significant discursive communities of their own. My research is a departure, contributing to the international theoretical discussion about beginning teachers and their work in the schools as micropolitical environments (Curry *et al.* 2008, Kelchtermans 2005, 2009, Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). My research is based on the understanding of

teaching as a relational and emotional practice (Hargreaves 1998, 2001a). Furthermore, due to the setting of the study where the researcher comes from a culturally different background from the participants and their context, there is also a cultural-anthropological element to my research. Because of this, my research also contributes to the methodological discussion about combining narrative and ethnographic research about a foreign culture and producing and analysing narrative research materials in a non-native language (that is not English).

Even though internal variation and multiple voices have begun to appear in recent research, making sweeping generalisations of the culture and education, thus painting a really monolithic picture of Japan, has often been the sin of a many well-meaning researchers (DeCoker 2013). I try to avoid making such broad generalisations and falling into the trap of *nihonjinron* (日本人論 theories about the Japanese) and explain everything as unique to Japanese culture. Having said that, I do acknowledge that educational systems are heavily integrated into their surrounding cultures and societies, operating with a certain cultural logic that is not transferable to other contexts directly. I see teachers' work as one such system and also take that into account accordingly.

Regardless, I argue that there is a lot to be gained in conducting studies in different educational settings, even if the point is not to do a direct comparison to any other context or system. Moreover, cultural analysis of different systems, especially the holistic and cultural accounts of Japanese education, has a revelatory function: it can help us see that many conceptual dichotomies are not natural, but rather constructed and that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Hoffman 2013). Broader narratives from the macro level are always present and have to be taken into account appropriately when interpreting stories, but instead of fixating on what is "Japanese", the focus is on what the stories tell about the work of beginning teachers and accompanying tensions in a more universal sense.

Readers can use the results and discussions of the research as a mirror to reflect upon the nature of the teaching profession in their own countries. Beginning teachers' work in Japan is very challenging (Kudomi & Satô 2010), and by listening to the stories of beginning teachers it is possible to bring to light some of the mechanisms that produce challenges. I take a similar stance to that of Clandinin (2006) and King (2003), who argue that by changing the stories we live by, we gain the possibility to change our lives. Here, the participating teachers telling their stories have an opportunity for a "change". Furthermore, because our own stories live inside larger stories, individual lives can be affected by the retelling of social, cultural or institutional narratives. Due to this connection, stories represent a means

for social change as well. The knowledge in narrative research is multi-voiced, and its strength is in how it can give voice to silenced voices and present counter-narratives to challenge the sometimes-oppressive 'grand narratives' found in broader narratives (Heikkinen 2002, Maclure 1993). I will deepen the understanding on the relational and emotional realities of beginning teachers and their work. By highlighting smaller stories from teachers' everyday work, add new perspectives that can challenge, even if on a tiny scale, the existing and dominant stories of beginning teachers.

## **1.2 The research question**

This thesis is built from three articles that will be published in peer-reviewed journals and this summary. Each article had its own precise questions, which are introduced in the articles themselves and in the overview of articles presented in Chapter 5. The research started with a very broad interest in the beginning teachers' work as an emotional and relational practice that takes place within the schools as micropolitical environments. However, the research questions evolved during the process, as did the final overarching thesis question, which emerged from the questions posed in the three articles.

Through utilizing different research materials and viewpoints, I have focused on the different relationships beginning teachers have with the significant actors in their schools and the tensions that are connected to these relationships. In this summary, I take a closer look at these tensions and search out their origins. Following this, the overarching research question in this thesis is:

*Based on teachers' stories, what kinds of tensions characterise beginning teachers' work?*

## **2 Placing the research on a theoretical and methodological landscape**

In this chapter I go through the theoretical and methodological underpinning of the research. I situate it as a part of the larger continuum of research on (beginning) teachers' work as told by the teachers themselves. Here I also contextualise the research by providing information about the Japanese education system and Japanese teachers' work. The major theoretical approach of examining the school as a micropolitical environment is also explained here.

### **2.1 Who are beginning teachers and why study their work?**

There is no universally agreed upon definition for what I have chosen to call “beginning teacher” in my research. They are, of course, those teachers who are in the first stage of their career. The terms used to refer to these teachers vary greatly between contexts, languages used and ideological purposes (Fransson & Gustafsson 2008). The terms new teacher and beginning teacher are avoided in some contexts as they have become politically improper and ‘early career teacher’ has been suggested as the most neutral replacement. There is also the term ‘novice teacher’ (Caspersen & Raaen 2014), while some prefer to use ‘newly qualified teachers’ (Aspford & Bondas 2012), but it is often used strictly for those who are in their first or second year of teaching (Ruohotie-Lyhty 2013). Furthermore, in the Japanese context “newly qualified teachers” is problematic, as many teachers work for several years with temporary contracts, having not passed Japan’s highly competitive employment test and, therefore, they are not full teachers officially, although they have formal qualifications. I chose to use the term beginning teacher in Article I because it is the word used in existing research on Japanese teachers (Ahn 2014, Miyajima 2004, Shimahara 2002) and, after that, I continued to use the term to maintain consistency within the related works.

In the majority of existing literature, a “beginning teacher” is defined as someone who has been in the teaching profession somewhere for five years or less. From the perspective of teacher socialisation, the first three to five years are said to be the most meaningful for professional development (Aspfors 2012). In my research, beginning teachers are those having zero to seven years of teaching experience. The reason for choosing a wider definition is that in Japan, teachers are typically transferred to a new school after working for six to seven years, at the latest, at one place. In Japan, after this first transfer teachers are no longer

considered to be beginners. In addition, I honoured self-identification: if a teacher thought of him- or herself as a beginner, his or her story was eligible. The likely reason for someone who has worked in the field for seven years considering himself or herself to be a beginning teacher is that there is an emphasis on seniority in Japanese organisations and in the culture in general. When talking with teachers in the field, including the beginning teachers themselves, they often used the word *wakai kyōshi* (若い教師), which translates as ‘a young teacher’. The term young teacher also refers to his or her relative position within the hierarchy of the school organisation, essentially their status as the junior (*kōhai*) member. Because of this, a teacher can be ‘young’ even in his or her 30s if (s)he happens to be the youngest one around. Except for those who had held non-teaching jobs before becoming educators, most beginning teachers were actually young in physical years. Those who entered the field immediately after university were approximately 23 years old.

I was awakened to the challenging nature of the teachers’ work in Japan and the sometimes harsh experiences of beginning teachers when doing background reading for my fieldwork. I got glimpses of beginning teachers’ difficulties through stories read for my master’s thesis, and I knew that burn-out due to stress was a major reason for teachers leaving the profession in Japan and elsewhere (see Clandinin *et al.* 2015, Kudomi & Satō 2010). However, I was still shocked when reading the story of one extremely unfortunate teacher. In burnout cases, the reason is often the heavy workload and expectations that are put on teachers, but the saddest cases were all closely connected to the relational nature of the profession: the problems started with challenging students and their uncooperative parents who blamed the teachers which, in turn, led colleagues and especially principals, to blame the teacher for being weak and unsuitable for the profession rather than offering support and solidarity. In one such situation, an enthusiastic and dedicated young teacher did not just experience burnout and leave the profession, she literally burned herself to death (Kudomi & Satō 2012). This is a very extreme example even in a country where suicide is unfortunately common choice (OECD 2013), but it serves as a wake-up call to the growing problem of high teacher turnover throughout the world (Day *et al.* 2005, Ingersol 2001, Peters & Pearce 2012). In Japan, the teacher turnover on average has been historically low compared to other developed countries (Fujita 2007), but in big metropolitan areas like Tokyo and Osaka, where the social competition is highest and expectations placed on teachers is strongest, a similarly high rate of new entrants dropping out of teaching has started to occur (Wakimoto & Chōshi 2015).



Prior international research on beginning teachers' work has highlighted different challenges, that can be divided roughly into three categories: 1) challenges connected to requirements of the work, for example, increasing complexity and intensification of the work (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2009, Le Maistre & Paré 2010, Murai, 2012), or heavy workload (Aspfors 2012); 2) challenges related to educational relationships such as those with students and problems of classroom management (Aspfors 2012, Kudomi & Satô 2010, McCormack & Thomas 2003, Veenman 1984), difficulties in collegial relationships (Brante 2012, Hargreaves 2002), or problematic relationships with parents (Lasky 2000); and 3) challenges dealing with the "publicity" of the work such as the increased accountability and performativity (*i.e.* measuring how well the teachers perform their duties (Ball 2003).

Traditionally the challenges faced by new teachers entering the field has been associated with difficulties of managing the classroom and the daily rigours of learning to teach. The shock has been described by very colourful metaphors: 'as something between a dress rehearsal and a daily performance' (Britzman 2003), 'like being thrown into water with hopes of learning to swim' (Varah, Theune & Parker 1986) and 'baptism by fire' (O'Connor 2008). As if that were not enough, when beginning teachers enter the schools they also come face to face with an organisational environment and its (micro)politics, both of which can be bewildering in their complexity (Curry *et al.* 2008). Beginning teachers are often unprepared for the organisational and collegial side of the profession and the emotional shock of being in relationships with colleagues can be as intense as those with students (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). The unpreparedness for these challenges may be attributable to a gap in teacher education and mentoring practices: teacher training typically focusses classroom dynamics and curricula, while the political context (organisational context of schools, professional communities, local and macro policy environments) is often disregarded or overlooked (Achinstein 2006).

In earlier research literature, there was broad consensus that the first years of teaching can be very challenging because of the relational and emotional dimensions of teachers' work (Blomberg 2008, Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002) and that teachers facing difficulties without support from colleagues is seen as a major contributing factor to teacher attrition (Hong 2010). Notably, despite on the universal awareness of the challenges beginning teachers confront and the importance of support, attempts to address these problems have often been insufficient, and beginning teachers have been left to cope without proper

organisational support (Caspersen & Raen 2014, Le Maistre & Paré 2010). And without proper support, not only do the beginning teachers suffer, but the students feel the consequences as well. Because the wellbeing teachers and student are symbiotic, students benefit indirectly when their beginning teachers are bolstered by organisational supported (Aspfors 2012, Bullough 2008). Being mindful about how teachers are faring and providing support when needed is worthwhile for the well-being of all stakeholders.

## **2.2 The school as a micropolitical environment**

Teachers do not work in a political or historical vacuum, and schools do not operate outside of the surrounding culture and society. In this research, the macro-level influence of the various broader narratives views the school as a micropolitical environment where influences from the wider culture and society are integral in beginning teachers' work. The nature of this micropolitical environment is dependent on the particularities of local contexts, organisational structures and policies (Curry *et al.* 2008). Relationships with colleagues, students, administrators and parents develop within, and they are influenced by all elements of the ecosystem and the context within which teachers conduct their work (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002, Shapiro 2010). The content and production of stories are similarly always contextualised and historically situated, and they reflect meaningful interaction with cultural, structural and institutional environments (Kelchtermans 2016). Thus, the various dimensions of the micropolitical environment provide necessary context to make the teachers' stories in this research understandable. The nature of the school as a micropolitical environment influences beginning teachers' thinking, action and storytelling (Kelchtermans 2016). In subchapter 2.4 I will take a closer look at various forces that set boundaries and influence the micropolitical environment of Japanese schools to provide a means for understanding both the origins and the actualisation process of tensions.

A school's micropolitical environment bears resemblance to the concept of school culture, which Barth (2002: 7) has defined as 'a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organisation'. Here I have chosen to approach the schools as micropolitical environments, because they address not just the encapsulated community of the school as does the above definition of school culture. Instead this study's approach also incorporates the external world (Lindle 1999) as well as the structural and political aspects of the organisation. When

looking at the school as a micropolitical environment, the focus is on the use of formal and informal power within an organisational context to further one's goal and agendas; this applies to both groups and individuals (Blase 1991).

When approached from this perspective, many actions of teachers in their everyday work can be seen as meaningful to advancing their interest (Hoyle 1982). Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002: 108) introduced the idea that teachers will strive to create what they consider to be ideal working conditions – conditions that enable them to work effectively – and that, once established, teachers will act to safeguard or restore these working conditions if they are endangered or erased. Kelchtermans & Ballet further divided these interests into five categories, which can all be at stake simultaneously: 1) self-interests related to professional identity and social recognition, 2) material interests, which involves availability of physical necessities of the work, 3) organisational interests concerning the roles, positions and formal tasks within the school, 4) cultural-ideological interests that deal with normative values and ideas about 'good' teaching in the school and, 5) social professional interests dealing with quality of interpersonal relationships within the school (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002: 110). These interests and their interrelatedness are important in this research, because tensions are often connected to the way in which teachers balance these different interests in the face of heavy workloads and other commitments.

Because of the all-encompassing nature of the relational and organisational dimensions of the work, learning the skills required to handle these dimensions is one of the most important challenges for beginning teachers (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). Learning to understand the school as a micropolitical environment and act in it has been defined by Kelchtermans (2005) as micropolitical literacy, a skill that is an important part of socialisation in the teaching profession, where the beginning teachers learn how to negotiate their place in the school and establish and maintain ideal working conditions to enhance or advance their professional interests (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). Micropolitical literacy is a dynamic phenomenon that is dependent on the particulars of the context and situation (*i.e.* the micropolitical environment according to Lanas & Hautala 2015) while understanding that the environment may change suddenly when new information enters the picture (Curry *et al.* 2008). Additionally, the same micropolitical environment and the micropolitical actions can appear dissimilar among members, because each person interprets them through their unique backgrounds, social positions and so forth (Lanas & Hautala 2015).

### 2.3 Narrative lenses

This research is conducted within the wider theoretical, ontological, epistemological and methodological framework of narrative research. In this subchapter I will present some ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie narrative research, but the focus is more on this study's particular narrative. First of all, the narrative forms the methodological starting point of the research and has guided my choices in distinct ways throughout the process. Narrative research is typically a strongly inductive process: a growing understanding of the studied phenomena changes the approach toward the production and analysis of the research material (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin 2013). The strong humanistic philosophical underpinning, emphasis on the uniqueness of lives and experiences of individual people, the possibility to include multiple voices in a single research that highlights the relative nature of 'truth' when it comes to phenomena in the social reality of narrative research was what drew me to the method (Riessman 2008, Spector-Mersel 2010a). The relative nature and possibility for multiple 'truths' was also important selection criteria.

Narrative research, as a term, can refer to the research materials used, specific method of analysis, theoretical/philosophical and methodological attitude toward conducting research or the product of the research that can be arranged into a form of narrative (Clandinin 2006, Heikkinen 2002). By the broadest definition, any study that analyses narrative materials such as narratives produced in interviews, ethnographic observations, diaries, news etc. (Lieblich *et al.* 1998, Heikkinen 2002) or uses a method for analysing texts that share the storied form (Riessman 2011) can be called narrative research. What 'narrative' means in my research is not, however, limited to solely using narratives as research material. Instead, the method of analysis is grounded in ontological and epistemological assumptions of the narrative paradigm, where the stories do not just reflect reality; they actually construct it.

Stories do not exist prior to the event of telling them to someone, which means that all the stories from the interviews result from a co-production process instead of being something that the researcher simply records or gathers (Spector-Mersel 2010a). Furthermore, narrative research can be research with narratives, for example, in cases in which the stories are used as a means to study phenomena of interest, or narrative research can be research on narratives, making the narratives themselves the object of the research (Bamberg 2012). Here, I am addressing the phenomena of beginning teachers' work through their stories and, thus, I am doing

research on narratives. However, secondarily, my study is also research on narratives, as due to the nature of the research and the reality that the how-and-why stories are produced in the research setting and, therefore, they have great meaning for the analysis (Spector-Mersel 2014).

Researchers in different disciplines often use “story” and “narrative” as synonyms despite there being significant difference between them. Amidst the often unbridled terminology usage, Hyvärinen (2008) and Riessman (2008) remind us not to use the words “narrative” and “story” too recklessly lest they lose all argumentative power and conceptual clarity.

In this research, there are three distinct ways I use the concept of ‘story’ and ‘narrative’. First, I acknowledge the differentiation based on Abbott’s (2002) use of this terminology, in which narrative is the wider concept encompassing the telling, which produces the form containing the story. Story is then defined simply as a presumed course of events. Second, I use the words the same way that Clandinin and Connelly (1994: 416) used them: ‘story’ describes what respondents relate in interviews or other research situations – in other words – the participants’ account. ‘Narrative’, on the other hand, refers to the research approach and its ontological and epistemological grounding. Third, I also consider the different cultural and social influences that impact the schools as broader narratives that may become significant within each micropolitical environment (see Subchapter 3.1).

In its “purest” form, a narrative consists of two events that follow each other chronologically or something that can be fit into the traditional beginning-middle-end structure that includes tension among different events (Riessman 2008). However, for my purposes, narrow definitions such as this do not really serve a purpose. As the stories in my research were told in an interview setting, elicited either through open, broad questions or told by the participants spontaneously, it is more relevant to look for what distinguishes them from other discourse that takes place during interviews, such as question-and-answer exchanges, descriptions, chronicles and listings (Riessman 2012). According to Bell (2009: 8) the defining characteristics of a narrative include a plot that holds together narrative sequences that are *“connected in a meaningful way for a particular audience in order to make sense of the world or people’s experience in it... more than a list of or chronicle, narrative adds up to ‘something’”*. Put another way, this ‘something’, the serial events in stories are always loaded with meanings that the narrator wants to relay to the listener (Riessman 2008), and the stories always serve a communicational purpose. From a functional perspective, narratives can be seen as comments on life and social expectations (Hyvärinen 2013). For these reasons, what I characterise

(and analyse) as stories in my research are short, episodic accounts meaningful to the teacher-storyteller rather than long autobiographical accounts typically considered stories in a research context. These kinds of short and episodic stories are close to what Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) call ‘small stories’, which are often brief accounts of everyday life. An example of this would be one of the participating beginning teachers recounting one student’s escape from her class to sit outside a third-floor bathroom window or, when talking about recent events at work, another teacher’s mention of a girl with an injured hand frequently causing problems in the classroom. Small stories like these are understood to be part of the teacher-storyteller’s understanding of him- or herself as a beginning teacher, communicated through interviews and interactions with them.

Through the act of narration, people tell of themselves and who they are (Holstein & Gubrium 2000). Some researchers go further and suggest that our lives themselves are storied (Bruner 1986). People both live stories and tell stories about the way they live (Clandinin 2006), and the telling of stories is one very fundamental way for people to make sense of themselves and the world that they live, trying to unravel their ambiguity and complexity (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Elbaz-Luwisch 2005). This meaning-making is enabled by the connection between the experience and the act of attaching meaning through reflecting upon and retelling various events (Bruner 1990).

Storytelling can also be understood as identity-work, because it is through stories that participants tell us who they are (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005) and how they want themselves to be seen (Bamberg 2012). If stories are seen as a means to understand one’s own life and “tell” him- or herself in certain ways, it follows that through retelling one’s own story, it is possible to change the way one presents oneself, which can possibly influence the understanding of oneself as well (Hinchman & Hinchman 2001).

Stories should not be taken as factual representations of lives, but they should not be treated as fiction either, because they are always grounded in real events or factual reality. Stories reflect reality as it is being formed and constructed in the process of being told. Thus, ontologically speaking narrative research, falls into the constructivist paradigm and claims that social reality is mainly a narrative reality (Spector-Mersel 2010a). Epistemologically speaking, it is important to remember that we cannot access the things that have taken place in the ‘real world’ nor the thoughts or experiences of the narrator directly (Riessman 2008), and the closest we can get to human experiences are the storytellers’ reconstructions of their experiences that take a storied form (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Hyvärinen &

Löyttyneimi 2005). The social world is something that does not exist in itself, but it is constantly being constructed, and the focus of the research inquiry therefore is in understanding how this production happens.

Stories in this research tell about the individual lives of the teachers, but they are also mediating tools that enable examination of the broader social, cultural and political context in which they are produced (Mishler 1995, Spector-Mersel 2010a). Stories are rooted to the immediate context of the narration, where the relationship between the researcher and participant plays a central role, as do the current conditions and situations of the narrator (micro context) and larger cultural and societal contexts (macro context) (Zilber *et al.* 2008). Lieblich *et al.* (1998) refer to these contexts as three spheres of narration: 1) immediate intersubjective relationships within which the stories are produced, 2) the social field in which the stories are situated and told and, 3) the system of broader cultural meaning and meta-narratives. This third level is where I understand the broader narratives to reside.

## **2.4 Contextualising the beginning teachers' work in Japan**

In this subchapter I will introduce the teacher's role in Japanese society, the process for beginning Japanese teachers to get their certificates, the policies and practices related to entering the field and working in it for the first years, and the teaching culture and organisational life in Japanese schools. This knowledge is important to us for understanding the position of the beginning teacher in relation to their colleagues and the power structures within the schools. In addition, this plays an essential role in understanding relationships within the micropolitical environments of the schools.

### **2.4.1 Teacher's role and its social meaning**

In the East Asian tradition, teaching was a respected profession, and the job was a relatively well-paying, highly sought after career until a couple of decades ago (White 1987), but due to societal and political changes, both the status and pay of the educator have been in decline (Sato 2011). Some speculate that one reason for this is that the teaching licence has become easier to obtain, making it less prestigious (Iwata 2004). Also, the decline in status may be connected to rising educational levels of parents, which puts teachers under increasing scrutiny and, potentially, receiving less support from parents, making teachers feel more

vulnerable (Gordon 2005a, 2005b). Recent neo-liberally oriented reforms in education that enforce increasing accountability changed the teacher's role from having a social or public responsibility to being providers of educational services to tax payers or to customers of the educational system. These changes have not only undermined teachers' dignity and professional autonomy, but they have also led to de-skilling the profession and the erosion of the informal professional culture (Sato 2011). This loss of autonomy and distinct professional identity has led some teachers to feel that they are no different from typical white-collar workers (Gordon 2005a). (One of the persistent debates in Japanese education is whether the teacher is an autonomous professional or just an educational worker.)

Japanese society has been experiencing great societal changes that have an effect on the education and the dynamics of (intra)school relationships (DeCoker 2013), and both teachers and the schools themselves have lost much of the respect they were previously afforded. In the past decades, Japanese education has undergone many drastic reforms as schools are called to solve educational and social pathologies and, in the process, teachers are subject to increasingly frequent evaluations, inspection and auditing (Fujita 2007). In Japan, teachers have been the scapegoats for various social problems and the target of relentless bashing by both the media and general public since the 1980s. The teacher bashing started around the time when then-Prime Minister Nakasone announced that 'Japan's modernisation process had ended' and enacted great reforms in education in the 1980s (Moriguchi & Pfeiffer 2002). Recently researchers like Murai (2012) argue that the teachers cannot perform their jobs fully because of the extensive paperwork they must provide to defend themselves from accusations and complaints.

In Japan, perennial education tensions also exist between those who believe that education should be governed from the top down and those who want more power at the local level. Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is calling for centralisation, while the strong teachers unions believe that the power should be dispersed to lower levels, providing teachers with more autonomy. Holders of these opposing views have had a long and bitter rivalry (Moriguchi & Pfeiffer 2002, Sato 2011). The teachers' unions are strongly politically aligned either for or against the central government and, because of the stigma attached and possible repercussions, (*e.g.* being passed over for promotion) taking a position is not easy (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999). Thus, the decision of whether to join a union can be tension-filled.



### **2.4.2 Teacher education, professional growth and progression**

The 1949 Law for Certification of Educational Personnel, together with other laws, sets conditions for teacher education. Japanese teacher education is a so-called open system, which means that the various certificates can be earned at any university with a teacher training program accredited by the Ministry of Education (Fujita 2007, Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2009). In reality, there are two types of institutes that award teaching licences or certificates: universities with faculties whose sole purpose is to train teachers and other colleges and universities that grant graduates the option to obtain a teaching licence (Iwata 2004). Though the licences or certificates are treated equally, the institutions themselves operate a bit differently. There are no minimum standards for becoming a teacher in Japan, and the curricula in the institutions vary greatly.

There are three basic levels of teacher's certificates for primary and secondary education: the highest is 'advanced', for those with a master's degree; 'first level' certificates are for those who have completed undergraduate coursework (the most common) and; 'second level' certificates are awarded to those who have completed junior college coursework. There are also three types of certificates: a 'non-subject specific certificate' is held by elementary teachers; a 'special subject certificate' for elementary teachers who teach, for example, music or arts and; a 'subject-based certificate' is required for all secondary school teachers (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2009). This certificate paradigm pertains only to teachers in the public schools; private schools do not necessarily require a teaching certificate. The certificate system is in place to ensure that teachers are teaching only the subjects they are trained to teach and, as a result, out-of-field teaching is rarely a problem in Japan (Fujita 2007). Under the current system, it is also possible to hire people with outstanding skills and knowledge in their specialised fields who have no educational background and no pedagogical experience as teachers and principals (OECD 2006).

As in many other countries, the Japanese teacher education programmes are criticised for offering courses that are not really relevant to classroom teaching (Howe 2005), and despite having progressed in many ways during the recent years, the link between the universities and the field is still weak (Howe 2008). Student teachers engage in a short three-week practicum at their alma mater, which does not provide sufficient time for students to experience the wide range of activities that are part of the teaching profession (Howe 2008). To balance out the limited practical experience gained during initial training, the Japanese system relies

heavily on in-service training that takes many shapes and forms. In addition, teachers themselves are also active in trying to improve their pedagogical skills (Fujita 2007). The idea that one only really learns to become a teacher by observing and absorbing wisdom of senior teachers is very strong in Japan, and senior teachers in schools are expected to mentor the newcomers and beginning teachers at the same time that the new and beginning teachers themselves actively seek guidance and good pedagogical examples from senior teachers (Shimahara, 2002). Graduates of teacher-training programs are essentially treated as novices in need of guidance, and learning how to teach in the Japanese education system is very much considered an apprenticeship (Stevenson & Stigler 1992).

The teacher service examination (採用試験 *saiyo shiken*) is offered annually. It is known to be a very competitive screening test for required for individuals wanting to land a permanent teaching job in Japan's public schools (Howe 2008). The examination varies a bit by area and teaching level, but it typically has a written (fixed-choice) test on subject matter as well as pedagogical theory and methods, and a proficiency portion that entails an interview and a demonstration lesson. An essay test may also be included. Only around 30 to 40 percent of graduates of teacher training colleges are estimated to secure employment in public schools (Fujita 2007), and the success rate for those taking the examination, is typically only around 15 percent (Kôbun 2016), though this varies somewhat by region and subject. The intense competition to enter the profession results in many aspiring teachers working as part-timers, which has created a two-tier system within the teaching force (Howe 2008). Part-time and temporary teachers are attractive to the schools, because they are not paid bonuses that full-time teachers receive although they practically perform the same job (Padilla & Riley 2003). Because part-time teachers do not receive induction training, their practical experience is very limited, which is a flaw in the Japanese education system that affects the quality of teaching (Howe 2008). The performance evaluation system for part-time and temporary teachers is different than that of permanent teachers, and part-timers are sometimes treated like second-class citizens within the teaching community in Japanese schools (Miyajima 2008).

After passing the employment examination, teachers are placed in schools according to the personnel needs of the area. During their first year on the job, teachers spend a great deal of time doing mandatory in-service training called *shoshinsha kenshû* (初心者研修 lit. beginner training) *Kenshû* means 'research study or study and training'. The number of days beginning teachers spend on induction training (which typically takes place outside the school in a training

centre) varies depending on the area, but it accrues to somewhere around 20 to 30 days (Howe 2005). Everyone has to take part in the induction activities even if they already had teaching experience (Padilla & Riley 2003). For those with several years' experience as part-time or temporary teachers, this 'beginner training' can be tiresome and seen as stealing away time from their responsibilities toward the school and children. All the teachers interviewed mentioned that the induction training was extremely time-consuming and that being away from their classes was an unwanted bother. On one occasion it was mentioned that the mentoring relationship aspect of the induction experience was a source of tension for the beginning teacher (see Article I).

The hiring of teachers is done by prefectural boards of education or "ordinance-designated" city boards of education, based on the personnel needs of local schools (Fujita 2007). Within the public school system, teachers are routinely rotated to different schools every four to seven years, with the first transfer of licenced teachers typically taking place after their sixth year (Shimahara 2002). This system, known as *jinji-ido* (人事移動 human resources transfer), is practised in the corporate world, too. The *jinji-ido* system is thought to ensure that teachers will gain experience in several different kinds of schools which will, in turn, improve their skills (OECD 2006). The system can also work to keep teachers from getting too complacent and the schools from becoming stagnant environments.

For the (beginning) teacher, changing schools means changing the relational and micropolitical environment as well. Even though the practice is rationalised as promoting professional growth, it is also a source of various problems: increased risk of burnout and other emotional crises, and loss of confidence in the ability to manage a class after an unsatisfactory transfer is not uncommon. In the long run, the benefits of the system are seen to outweigh the negatives, but the first transfer always shakes the world of the beginning teacher quite profoundly (Wakimoto & Chôshi 2015). After beginning teachers move to their second school, they often notice how the attitude of the experienced teachers changes toward them: the newcomers are treated as 'fully grown', and often they are not allowed to be helpless beginners, even though they might still need support (Wakimoto & Chôshi 2015). The impact on the teacher who changes schools is obviously significant, but the changes are also felt in the teaching community every year as well, as old teachers leave and new faces arrive sometimes in big numbers. Thus, teaching communities in Japanese schools are in a state of flux, which arguably has an effect on the morale within the schools as well.

### **2.4.3 Japanese teaching culture and organisational style of the schools**

Features of the Japanese teaching culture and organisational structures of Japanese schools influence both the interaction and development of relationships among beginning teachers and their colleagues and students. The composition of the teaching staff is a key aspect that defines the micropolitical environment of a given school. Teachers involved in this research mainly came from schools in two large urban areas. One major demographic change in the field of teaching in Japan is that the number of teachers started to decline in the 1990s (Kudomi 1999), a trend that has continued to this day and has led to a situation in which teachers who started working around the beginning of the decline are part of the inverted bell curve that represents the age distribution of Japan's teacher corps. Though it is somewhat area-dependent, Japanese schools today have lots of experienced senior teachers in their 50s and plenty of young teachers in their 20s and early 30s but not many teachers in between (Wakimoto & Chôshi 2015). This lopsided staff composition was a feature common to schools in both Japanese cities where the majority of the study's participating teachers came from.

According to Okano and Tsuchiya (1999) there are several pervasive features that characterise Japanese teaching: holistic and inclusive whole person education, close emotional bonds between teachers and their students that guide instructional styles, informal communication, interdependence, camaraderie and sharing of experience and information between teachers, and ethos of equality between teachers. All these are connected to the way the development of teacher relationships is understood to take place and what is meaningful in the work. The ethical commitment toward students forms the important basis for teachers' professional actions (Kelchtermans 2009). The teacher–student relationship is typically seen as a pedagogical relationship where the actions of the teacher are oriented toward the students and their benefit, and this involves “caring” for the students (van Manen 1991). In Japan too, this relationship is at the heart of teaching but as we will see this relationship is strongly influenced by the collegial relationships.

Creating close emotional bonds with students requires sincere interest in the child and knowing him or her well. In Japan, these kinds of relationships between the teacher and the students, referred to as *kizuna* (絆 lit. touching of hearts) or *kakawari* (関わり personal relationship), are an important part of ethnopedagogy. Ethnopedagogy is a practical theory of teaching built on traditional beliefs and

learned s in the socialisation process. It influences teaching and learning done in the Japanese context (Shimahara 2002). These kinds of close relationships are realised through frequent interaction with the students, including spending time outside formal instructional situations. For example, in the case of young students, teachers may play with them or, with older students, the teacher may guide them in after-school clubs, where informal interaction is possible. This ethnopedagogical view is a very significant component of what is considered 'good' teaching in Japan, but it is also a very central part of Japanese teachers' identity (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). Because the ethnopedagogical view is acquired through the socialisation process, other teachers in the school are considered to play a central role in the degree to which it is internalised. Although a teacher's relationship with the students is most central, it is not the one that influences the other educational relationships. Rather, the relationship that develops with the children is formed through a construct that aligns with the school's strategy, and it is modelled other teachers' interactions and relationships with their students (Yamazaki 2012). In their classrooms, teachers are often hidden from the eyes of other teachers, but when in public, the quality of teachers' relationships with their students and their ability to manage the class become quite visible. This exposure often leads to teachers being stricter and more authoritarian toward their students when other teachers observe their performance (Kelchtermans 1996, Yamazaki 2012).

It can be argued that in Japan, teacher education and teachers' professional growth have a strongly conservative and conforming effect on beginning teachers. Even though opportunities for in-service training abound both in and outside their schools (and especially during the mandatory first-year induction period), the biggest reason why the pre-service teacher education and teaching practicum can be kept relatively short is that in Japan, learning to teach and professional growth is understood to mainly take place as neophytes are exposed to a shared repertoire of practical knowledge by the more experienced teachers in the field. This view, labelled 'teaching as a craft' by Shimahara (2002) often takes a form of a kind of master-disciple relationship, where learning is based on emulation and identification characterised by one-way pedagogical exchanges in which some researchers argue that the beginning teacher is typically not able to provide much output or voice his/her own views directly (Howe 2005). However, though teachers do not vocalise their opinions, they certainly have them, and this description is not to suggest that the process is purely passive. It is actually an interactive process between the teacher and the environment that is filled with interpretation (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002).

The kind of collegial relationships that are sought in many countries where teaching has traditionally been seen as a solitary endeavour have been the norm in Japan since the beginning of the modern school institution. It is not just temporal collaboration when the situation calls for it, but instead the whole teaching culture is structured around close collegial cooperation: teachers are organised into grade-level groups, in which they sit close together and interact closely on a daily basis starting with joint morning meetings and continuing to the end of each school day. Management of the school is organised around departments and sub departments where everyone has clearly defined role and each teacher may concurrently be a member of several different committees with differing assigned tasks (Shimahara 2002). Furthermore, teachers' professional learning and development is understood to happen collegially either through an apprenticeship-like model of learning from the senior teachers (Shimahara 2002) or through frequently held study lessons where they design, execute and evaluate model lessons collectively (Howe 2005).

Teachers in Japan have many responsibilities that have to do with running the school as an organisation. At the top of the organisational hierarchy is the principal, followed by the vice principals of the various grade-levels. Teachers comprise the level below them, organised horizontally. There are many coordinators in Japanese schools, and the number of them grows when moving at the junior high level. Grade-level coordinators (*gakunen shūnin*) lead the teachers of their grade level, and there are coordinators of school programs, professional development and so forth. Together they constitute an operation committee that is vital for the functioning of Japanese schools. Operation committees are led by administrators and a coordinator of school programs, who is typically an experienced veteran teacher. (S)he typically has a heavy workload and a substantial task in overseeing many of the school's important operations. The coordinator of school programs is the third most prestigious position in the Japanese school organisation. (Shimahara 2002.)

Cooperation and harmony are the most important values in Japanese organisations, and they influence all aspects of the organisational climate, including internal relations and activities (Willis & Horvath 1988). From an organisational point of view, Japanese schools are structured so that the vertical hierarchy is not so great and, on the surface, the picture is egalitarian. There is also an ethos of equality among teachers; however, the equality is distributed according to employment status. Fully employed teachers are of equal standing regardless of age and experience and, because of this, teachers avoid directly communicating about what they should or should not do (Shimahara & Sakai 1995). However, the reality

is more complicated than that and, despite this ethos, the hierarchy in the schools is made clear in subtle ways understood by those in the school and visible to the keen observer (Willis & Horvath 1988). For example, I observed interactions between the beginning teachers and their seniors, and each group's posture and language signalled that they were not of completely equal standing (see Article II). As mentioned earlier, relationships within a Japanese school and organisational status is based on each individual's relative position to other teachers. Senior teachers are permitted to comment, to some degree, on the work of beginners, and the senior teachers also struggle with the conflicting demands of the no-comment culture and the need to instruct their juniors (Shimahara 2002).

The teaching culture and teaching community in any given school is a double-edged sword. Kudomi (1994) has argued that the Japanese teaching culture, has a 'hidden rule' that regulates strongly how teachers act. While this promotes conformity, it simultaneously also acts as a social source of strength and support that teachers can draw from when facing problems. International studies have shown that first years of teaching have a conservative influence on beginning teachers, because they want to fit in (Kuzmic 1994); even those who, to some extent, assert their originality and innovative side feel obligated to go along with the rules and the established culture of the school (Correa *et al.* 2015). Junior teachers are expected to internalise and behave within the norms of the senior teachers, and failing to adhere to dominant practices can lead to disciplinary actions (Saito & Atencio 2013). In the Japanese teaching culture, there is a push for conforming to the existing values of the school, which are born from 1) the emphasis on promoting harmonious and sympathetic relationships with colleagues (Miyajima 2008, Kudomi 1994); 2) cooperative management of the school, where all teachers have their specified – though interdependent and diffuse – roles (Shimahara 2002, Tsuneyoshi 2001) and; 3) the Japanese tendency to avoid standing out from others (Matsumoto 1996, Sugimoto 2003).





### 3 Tensions

In this chapter I outline my theoretical conceptualisation of tensions in beginning teachers' work. This conceptualisation is based on earlier research about tensions in teachers' work and within the education field, as well as on earlier research in which a similar phenomenon is referred to as dilemmas. The following conceptualisation of tensions is characteristic of the role of teachers, regardless of their working experience. However, as we will see, beginning teachers are most often in situations where tensions become activated.

#### 3.1 Definition of tension and an explanation of their connection to broader narratives

In everyday language, the word 'tension' has several meanings. For example, in a very abstract sense, tension refers to something 'being held in a state between two or more forces, which are acting in opposition to each other' (Sanakirja.org. 2016) or it can refer to a strained relationship between individuals, groups or nations.

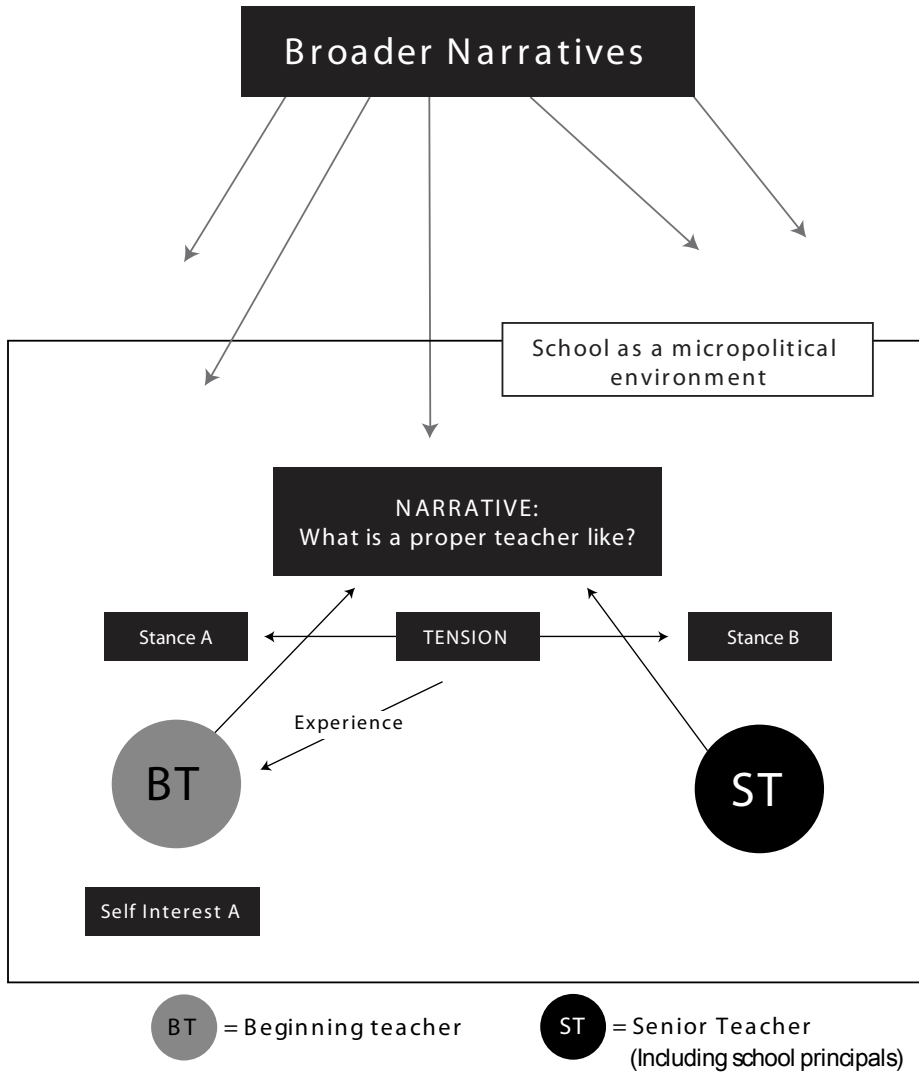
Andô (2005: 8) has defined tension in teachers' work as 'the teacher being unsure about what to emphasise in a situation where there are several possible justifiable courses for action'. Honig (1996: 258) defines dilemmas as situations where 'two values, obligations or commitments conflict and there seems to be no right thing to do'. This comes close to the description of many of the tensions in this research, but I choose to refer to them as tensions rather than dilemmas for the following reason: in dilemmatic situations, the individual is forced to choose between two or more conflicting options (Fransson & Grannäs 2013); however, tensions can be allayed through negotiation, during which it is possible to find a position that neutralises the two (or more) competing expectations.

Tensions are personal experiences but, similar to emotions, they are seen as social in their origin, born within the interaction between the individual and his or her social and cultural environment (Lasky 2000, Zembylas 2004, 2005). However, just as our individual experiences are shaped by the social, cultural and institutional narratives (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007: 42) that characterise our lives, tensions originate beyond the individual and the immediate field of social interaction. Zilber, *et al.* (1998) refer to these larger cultural and societal narrative contexts as the system of broader cultural meaning and meta-narratives. Here, I use the term broader narratives to refer to this collective meaning-making through narratives that is ever-present in the culture and which is used by individuals as the wellspring

and framework and for their personal meaning-making. Individual teachers are distinct from one another, and interpreting and deciding whether to accept the broader narratives is an active process involving many contextual influences. For that reason, individual teachers experience tensions subjectively, even when they arise from the same or similar situation (Andô 2005).

I understand broader narratives to consist of a) the stories and image of teachers and teaching prevalent in the culture and media (Andô 2005, Mitchell & Weber 1999); b) ideas about what constitutes a good teacher (Kelchtermans 1996) and; c) norms and values of the surrounding culture, especially those that concern social interaction and the nature of the educational relationship. It should be noted that broader narratives can also influence political and administrative policy decisions (such as educational reforms) which, in turn, alter norms, values, guidelines, obligations and relationships within the profession (Fransson & Grannäs 2013). An illustrative example of a polarizing broader narrative is the requirement for teachers to be accountable for the performance of their students, which is an obligation that conflicts with the way teachers typically define their own work (Ball 2003).

In short, broader narratives represent possible influences at the macro level. Most of the broader narratives exist within all schools, but the extent to which these broader narratives affect teachers' work depends on the school's micropolitical environment. And as unique environments, the schools also have their own strong narratives. By promoting a certain kind of (school) culture, principals, as leaders can de-emphasise or prevent some broader narratives from becoming significant in the teachers' everyday practices. These broader narratives are not neutral or optional; they are strongly normative and something that all teachers must conform to. The way in which beginning teachers position themselves is connected to their individual professional interests and their judgements on the relative importance of this conformity to their career success (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). The positioning process is illustrated in Fig. 1, which presents an example of how broader narratives are actualised among relationships within the school's micropolitical environment. The arrows pointing outside the micropolitical environment signify narratives do not become significant and teachers do not have to take a stance towards them. The ones that do become significant require the beginning teachers to assume a position towards it. Here, I refer to it as taking a stance. In the figure the stance A of the beginning teacher based on self-interest A, is opposed to the stance B of a senior teacher (this includes school principals). The tension is born between these two opposing stances.



**Fig. 1. Tension occurring from differing stances**

One major tension in teaching is arguably connected to the very nature of education as deeply moral practice (Kelchtermans & Hamilton 2004). Teachers who are morally and ethically engaged in their work are deeply interested in the wellbeing and growth of their students. All choices made by teachers have a moral component, but there are no rules or principles to guide them in how to act in many situations, as the acts are morally relational (Tirri & Husu 2002). Teachers are continually

faced with making decisions about ways to best serve their students' interests, but there is no clear right or wrong way of doing so. Rather, there are only better or worse courses of action (Hargreaves 1995). Kelchtermans (2005) has argued that in teaching there is no indisputable moral or philosophical justification for any given action that teachers take, meaning that their choices can always be contested and questioned. Therein lays a well-established portal for tensions to creep in. Typically, all teachers share the aforementioned norm of working for the students, but ideas about how to best serve the interest of students vary. Also, professional moral codes among colleagues may differ situationally, as sometimes teachers deviate from standard mores to enable them to care and take responsibility for the children (Tirri & Husu 2002). By reacting situationally or taking an unorthodox stance the possibility for tensions be emerge between themselves and those in their micropolitical environment who assumed a different stance (Achinstein 2006).

In one sense, tensions essentially boil down to what norms are prioritised in the school (Andô 2005) and whether they conflict with ideas that beginning teachers themselves hold (Achinstein 2006). In cases where some teachers believe that education should produce socially conscious and contributing members of the society, but the other teachers of the school do not care or emphasise only the development of the cognitive capabilities of the students, their self-interests come at odds with the cultural-ideological interests held by other teachers (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). If they choose to exert their self-interests, depending on the context, they may risk their social professional status, as challenging deeply held beliefs carries the risk of harming relationships with the holders.

In previous research, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) illustrated that teachers take their stance through the stories that they tell and live by. They also argued that the classroom and out-of-classroom places are moral and epistemologically different places, where teachers are expected to tell different stories. Teachers tell "secret stories" in the in-classroom landscapes, stories that express their personal practical knowledge and are connected to their inclinations on relationships, stories and reflection. These are stories matter to the teachers. However, they are expected to tell different stories in the out-of-classroom places using the abstract language removed from their classroom practices in order to come out as certain kind of experts. The problem of how to live out these conflicting stories pulling the teachers into different directions gives rise to tensions. (Clandinin & Connelly 1995.)

Some tensions also arise from specific expectations, norms and unwritten rules that may be contradictory in themselves (Achinstein 2006). Tensions are born when individuals have to live out incompatible roles, which also come back to the broader

narratives. Teachers' workplace roles can have several different manifestations and, as a result, the role of the teacher is full of internal tensions caused by the different values, interest and expectations that comprise it (Andô 2005). An example of this is the way how traditionally teachers have been expected to be rational professionals but, at the same time, their students' parents expect the teachers to also provide more holistic and moral education – which requires the teacher to be emotionally invested and caring (Pillen *et al.* 2013). Teachers whose philosophy is grounded in the importance of developing personal relationships with students can find it difficult to fit into or even get into a school's micropolitical environment if the dominant view is that teachers should be distant and rational professionals (Craig 1995).

There are other role-related teacher tensions, such as being a facilitator (Britzman 1991) versus being an interrogator of knowledge (Beach & Pearson 1998), or the tension between 'telling and growth' (Berry 2008), which is also a good example of how some tensions are integral to the very core of teaching and learning. The 'telling and growth' tension is the conflicting role of simply guiding and informing students about what to do versus creating opportunities for reflection and learning by on their own (Andô 2005). This kind of tension between shaping students according to set ideas versus allowing them to grow on their own can never be resolved and, instead, teachers must learn to live with this type of tension (Noddings 2001).

Broader narratives often remain unseen because we do not pause to look for them (Bruner 2002). Huber *et al.* (2004: 181) call attention to 'moments of tensions', which become visible when conflicting stories intersect. In their words: 'moments of tension where children's and teachers' stories to live by are seen to be resisting stories of schools'. I understand this to mean that the tensions are there even when not visible and, many times, they are not even consciously known by the people living within them. Nonetheless, they become visible when voices and stories rub up against each other. This highlights the way in which tensions are present in relationships between people, signifying that something interesting from the perspective of the research is taking place and, depending on the type of research, calls for an ethically considerate attitude. (Huber *et al.* 2004.)

### **3.2 Connections to power relationships**

The relationships are at the heart of the teaching profession: teachers often cite the educational relationships as both the reason for becoming a teacher as well as for

staying in the profession, as these human connections provide long-term job satisfaction (Aultman *et al.* 2009, Hansen 1998, Hargreaves 2000, Lasky, 2005, van Manen 1991). I share Hargreaves' (1998) view that teaching is a relational practice. Tensions have been found within teacher-parent relationships (Cross & Hong 2012, Lasky 2000), relationships with colleagues (Aspfors & Bondas 2013, Avila de Lima 2001, Bullough & Draper 2004, Hargreaves 2001b, 2010, Shapiro 2010) and the teacher-student relationship (Aultman *et al.* 2009, Hargreaves 2000, Newberry 2010, Pillen *et al.* 2013). The foundations of these relationships are influenced by the organisational structures of the schools, educational policies and the surrounding culture.

Even though relationships with students is the cornerstone of teaching profession, collegial relationships constitute an influential aspect of teachers' working conditions, the quality of collegial relationships and interaction becomes important (Leithwood 2006). Furthermore, Ingersoll (2007) argues that collegial relationships influence teachers' job satisfaction and affect teacher retention. Jennifer Nias (1996) observed that teachers' strongest negative emotional reactions stem from interactions with peers or superiors rather than those with students, and other researchers have confirmed this (Devos *et al.* 2012, Hargreaves 2001a, Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). Collegial relationships represent many things that either promote or hinder teaching: they represent both practical and emotional support, and serve as a source of ideas and critique, camaraderie and such, but also they can also embody many not-so-positive aspects: competition, conformity, betrayal, jealousy, blaming, shaming and even abuse, especially if vertical power relations are involved (Aspfors 2012, Blomberg 2008, Kudomi & Satô 2010). Dealing with conflicts and tensions with one's colleagues is a great challenge for teachers and something that teachers try to avoid by establishing norms of politeness and non-interference (Little 1990, Shimahara 2002) or by maintaining lukewarm relations and comfortable levels of interactions (Avila de Lima 2001).

Developing social relationships in the school – especially with senior colleagues – and dealing with school politics and staffroom power struggles have been found to be a source of tensions for beginning teachers (McCormack & Thomas 2003). Along the same lines as McCormack and Thomas, in her research Jessica Aspfors (2012) points out that there is a simultaneous push for both more symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships within the social sphere of the schools. Symmetrical and reciprocal relationships represent dialogical and caring relationships, and Aspfors (2012) concluded that for beginning teachers, being cared for is really important in the beginning stages of their career. However, the

omnipresent assessment and accountability within teaching conflicts with these caring relationships and this represents asymmetrical relationships. This is one example of how different conceptualisations of teachers' work are activated in the micropolitical environment of schools. Researchers have found that it is not uncommon for colleagues to disregard or ignore the ideas of enthusiastic beginning teachers who want to change practices or try innovative methods (McCormack & Thomas 2003, Nyman 2009, Sabar 2004, Ulvik & Langorgen 2012). McCormack and Thomas (2003) found that if the teacher community of a school devalues ideas and opinions of beginning teachers, tensions can result. This real-world situation can be bewildering to beginning teachers, as they are encouraged in their teacher education programmes to challenge old ideas (Beach & Pearson 1998).

In this research the *senpai-kōhai* 先輩-後輩 (senior-junior) relationship is central to understanding collegial relationships. The social positions specific to the senior colleague and junior colleague guide social interactions between the teacher and the students as well as between the teachers. The older and/or the more experienced member of any given social group takes the position of *senpai*, responsible for socializing and supporting the *kōhai* who, in turn, have to act obediently and respectfully toward the *senpai* (Rohlen 1991). Despite the power differential and having the potential to be very stifling and conformity inducing (Howe 2008), these relationships are typically experienced positively by teachers and often include a strong dimension of emotional closeness. This hierarchy is tied to the nature of cooperation in the schools. In any organisation, the voices and opinions of newcomers are often not heard. Such is the fate of beginning teachers in Japanese schools too, and this situation is accentuated by the culture's strong vertical relationships. Having to earn the right to verbalise opinions and express ideas in the community is nothing unique to Japan. However, given the strong influence of Confucianism that emphasises respect toward one's elders, it is arguably more strongly guarded in Japan.

### **3.3 Cultural and social values and norms as broader narratives in Japan**

For the purposes of this research, acknowledging Japan's cultural tendencies concerning relationships and emotional expression are key because, in practice, they may be a catalyst of tension in beginning teachers. For example, the *honne* (本音) and *tatemae* (建前) division (true feelings – façade) that refers to the tension between the private and public selves, and how in Japan, the real thoughts

and feelings are often hidden behind a public exterior. It can be understood as a culturally meaningful display rule [definition similar to emotional rules detailed in next subchapter] (Matsumoto 1996) that is ever-present in teachers' work and, thus, a potential source for tensions.

The type of emotional expression that is considered preferable is connected to how the relationship between self and others can thus be defined culturally. Dorinne Kondo (1990) argues that Japanese identities are not fixed; rather, they are diffuse and adaptive, depending on whom they are interacting with. In other words, the identity and the actions of individuals are conditioned by their relative position to others in their social field (Sugimoto 2003). In Japan, the self is often viewed as being interdependent and the focus is on the "self-in-relation-to-other" or the "other" instead of existing independently. This means that others participate actively in the definition process of the interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama 1991). One is rarely allowed to be a free spirit and is instead is always defined by his or her obligations and links to others. In Kondo's words: 'You are not an "I" untouched by the context, rather you are defined by the context' (1990: 26). Markus & Kitayama (1991) have found that in cultures where the interdependent self is the norm, people exercise self-control and agency to adjust themselves to their different interpersonal contingencies, and often one's own opinions take a secondary role in the important task of maintaining interdependence. In this context maintaining harmonious relationships or *wa* (和) within one's social group becomes more important than emphasising one's role as an individual (Genzberger 1994).

There are several socially legitimised dualistic conceptual pairs that influence the social interaction and accompanying emotional expression in Japan. One of these conceptual pairs is *uchi* (内) and *soto* (外) (lit. home and outside) that divides relationships with different people and groups into those belonging to the in- or out-group, or insiders and outsiders. Individuals change their communication style and content to correspond to whether they are dealing with those from the inside or outside group (Sugimoto, 2003). The expression of *honne* (true self), that is, open talk about one's emotions and confidential issues does not ordinarily occur with persons who do not belong to the '*uchi*', which consists of those who are the closest to the individual (Doi 1991, Sugimoto 2003). Interactions between people of the same group are typically close and direct, while persons belonging to the outer group are treated in a removed and cool manner. The line between *uchi* and *soto* is not static, which means that any one individual can belong to either of the two groups depending on the social situation (Finkelstein *et al.* 1991).



Kondo (1991) considers the boundaries of all these dualistic pairs to be contextually constructed, shifting and, therefore, referentially empty. From this I understand that the tensions related to these pairs and their accompanying appropriate actions are never completely resolved and become active depending on the context. The conceptual pairs that guide people in their social interactions are in no way unique to Japan; people everywhere make distinctions between their private and public selves and regulate their accompanying behaviour accordingly. However, in the Japanese context the guiding pairs are more pervasive and are frequently invoked in public discourse to “defend the publicly unacceptable sides of life as realities to be accepted” (Sugimoto 2003: 29).

### **3.4 Emotional dimension of tensions**

The tensions that originate from broader narratives and are activated within the beginning teacher’s workplace also involve emotions. In its everyday usage ‘tension’ often refers to ‘mental or emotional strain; intense, suppressed suspense, anxiety, or excitement’ (Dictionary.com 2016), suggesting that it is a psychological and emotional state ‘owned’ by an individual. Berry (2008: 32) has defined tension as ‘the feeling of internal turmoil when pulled in different directions by competing concerns and the difficulty of learning how to manage these opposing forces’. Tension has also been seen as an emotion or a feeling (Uitto *et al.* 2015) or framed as emotional tensions which, for Meyer (2011), are tied to relationships that pre-service teachers are attempting to build. The difference between tension as emotion and emotional tension seems to be that the first is an emotion and the latter is connected to emotional experience. In this research tensions are not understood as emotions as such, but the experience of being pulled in several directions at the same time.

Tension can involve various emotions depending the teacher’s inner resources at the moment. The emotional dimension of the tensions is often negatively charged (Meyer 2011), but it can be a positively energizing state if understood as it was by Clandinin *et al.* (2009). Instead of seeing tensions as problems or something to be smoothed over, they regarded tensions in a more relational way: “tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways” (Clandinin *et al.* 2009: 82). Additionally, tensions are often seen as just a problem or disturbance to the work, but in many cases, if approached open-mindedly, they can actually be invaluable impetus for professional growth.

### **3.4.1 What are emotions?**

Emotions in teaching were ignored for a long time as a topic for serious academic research, because emotions were considered too feminine in the context of masculine ideal of ‘classical professionalism’, and they were often ignored in educational policy and administration as well (Hargreaves 2000, 2001). However, during the past 30 years, literature on the various roles of emotions in teaching has been steadily growing (Uitto *et al.* 2015). Several researchers have argued strongly that because the dimension of human interaction is central to teaching and emotions are an inseparable part of the interaction, teaching is essentially an emotional practice (Hargreaves 1998, 2001a, Nias 1996, Sutton & Wheatley 2003). Furthermore, emotions have been identified as playing an integral role in many parts of teachers’ work, including their perceptions, interactions, decision-making, professional development and identity formation. Zembylas (2005) has thus correctly argued that we need to take emotions into account if we want to understand the experiences of teachers. Teachers’ emotions also are key in helping them negotiate roles and tensions of the workplace; they are an integral component of micropolitical literacy (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). As my research is focused on tensions as a relational phenomenon conditioned by the micropolitical environment of the school, paying attention to the emotional experiences of teachers is vital.

Emotions are understood in my research as conditions of personal, socio-cultural and situational dimensions. Emotions have a biological and neurological basis, but here the focus is on their social construction (Lasky 2005, Zembylas 2003) and connection to the socially and culturally established structures of meaning (White 1993). Emotions are formed through active attempts to adapt to one’s surrounding cultural and social environment (Solomon 2003), and they are also morally charged and culturally value-laden: By analysing emotional responses to actions and events, it is possible to evaluate their cultural meaning (Hargreaves 2001a, Markus & Kitayama 1994). Emotion can be understood as evaluative judgements (meaning that they require rational thought) that are typically about one’s situation and about oneself and/or other people, and that are connected to one’s goals and status (Nussbaum 2001, Solomon 1993).

The dominant understanding of oneself and others in inter-relational terms in Japan has implications for the way in which emotions are experienced and expressed. For example, other-focused emotions that promote interdependence, such sympathy, shame and feelings of interpersonal communion take precedence

over ego-focused emotions like pride and anger, which are seen as a possible threat to interpersonal connections. For these reasons, people feel the need to control their private emotions (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Culturally, central emotions such as *amae* (甘え) (dependence) are not personal feeling states, but they characterise an interdependent relationship between two people (Matsumoto 1996). Being able to ‘read’ what other people are thinking and feeling and understand their emotions intuitively is more important than verbalizing one’s own emotions. Listening, recognising and understanding the emotions of others plays a culturally central role (Tobin *et al.* 2009). Being sensitive to others’ emotions and having emotional understanding is also important when trying to prevent others from ending up in difficult situations where there is a risk of losing face (Rice 2004) or losing the colleague support that is paramount for success as a teacher in Japan.

Through paying attention to emotions, *i.e.* how teachers interpret and value their surrounding environment through events, objects and relationships with significant characters in their professional lives, it is possible to gain knowledge both about the teachers’ relationships and the structural realities of their work (Kelchtermans 2016). Because they are value-laden, emotions also offer clues about what is culturally and socially meaningful to the participating teachers, and connects their personal experiences to wider issues.

### **3.4.2 Emotional rules and broader narratives**

As seen above, emotions play an important role in teachers work, but teachers have found the range of expressible emotions to be limited (Shapiro 2010). In their work, teachers cannot always express their emotional reactions to experiences (directly) and must suppress emotions they think are unsuitable and, in fact, sometimes must react in way that to that are ‘appropriate’ for the social situation in question. Michaelinos Zembylas (2005) has conceptualised expectations and norms within the school as a micropolitical environment, referring to emotional expression as ‘emotional rules’. The rules that are developed in the school are exercised through institutional power, and teachers are normalised into a certain kind of emotional expression. As the rules are socially constructed, individuals can choose how to respond to these rules, and they can further choose to resist or conform to the existing norms or expectations (Theodosius 2008). But in order to do this, teachers must engage in emotional labour, which involves suppressing, evoking and shaping emotions (Zembylas 2005). Emotional rules determine “how teachers should or should not feel about curriculum, teaching and themselves” (Zembylas 2003: 118-

119) and, thus, emotional rules thus force teachers to take a certain stance toward the different broader narratives. Someone could argue that going along with the rules is a way to prevent tensions from originating various situations by not removing the possibility of making the wrong choice. However, tensions inevitably arise because unless the teacher changes his or her (pedagogical) views and ideals, the stance they wished to take still goes against the one that they are being forced to assume by the emotional rules. Thus, the gap between the forced position, the position the teacher wished to take and the emotional labour they were obligated to perform to conform to the school's emotional rules can be seen as a source of tensions in beginning teachers' work. This is particularly significant if the school's emotional rules are strongly in conflict with the teacher's personal values and professional identity.

There are many different reasons for teachers needing to manage their emotions. One has to do with the conceptualisation of 'proper teacher' and expectations about a proper teacher's behaviour and feelings (Kelchtermans 1996). The rules are not the same for everyone, because those in power decide what kind of emotional expression is allowed and who can express it. In a hierarchical society, a senior member's show of anger or blunt treatment of people of lower status is allowed, but those in the lower status cannot imagine doing so to their superiors (Steinberg 2013). Thus, it follows that beginning teachers are typically those whose range of expressible emotions is most limited. This hierarchical aspect is especially important in the case of emotional rules concerning beginning Japanese teachers-work because the senior-junior relationship that greatly influences interactions with older colleagues is essentially a power relationship. Due to focus on the emotions of others in interpersonal culture, and the emphasis placed on maintaining harmonious relationships, the emotional rules are arguably very influential in how teachers position themselves toward different broader narratives and, thus, have meaning on tensions. Learning the emotional rules is part of the socialisation process into the teaching profession. These kinds of rules regarding emotional experience and expression maintain the inequality, but the rules themselves do not need to be explicitly enforced, because internalizing these rules until they feel natural and a part of one's personality is part of the socialisation process itself (Hochschild 1983).

## 4 The research process

In this chapter I describe the research process in detail, starting with the original story of the research, followed by look into what it was like to get into the field in Japan and produce the research material. This involved interacting with and interviewing teachers, and observing and participating in the everyday life of a junior high school. The analysis also incorporated discussion on issues concerning translation of the research material.

### 4.1 Production of the research material

The research material produced for the purposes of this study consisted of interviews with 16 beginning teachers and seven senior teachers (including the school principals). See Table 1 below for details. Field notes were written in K-school (a particular junior high school) as a participant observer. First, I will introduce how the interviews were conducted and how the nature of the researcher-participant relationships is seen to influence the storytelling in the interview setting. After that, I take a closer look into how I got into the field in Japan and what it meant to conduct narrative-ethnographic research in a Japanese junior high school.

**Table 1. Summary of all the research material produced for the research**

Type of research material	Production Period	Amount of research material
Interviews: beginning teachers	12.2013–10.2015	16 teachers, 9 interviewed twice
Interviews: senior teachers	03.2014–03.2015	7 teachers
Field notes	02.2014–11.2015	~42 A4 Pages

### 4.2 The interviews

The first time interviewing a teacher for this research couple of months after arriving in Japan was exciting and also a bit unnerving, as it was my first time ever conducting an interview, and using non-native language added another layer of complexity. The interview was successful, however, and the material produced was as good. Subsequent interviews were obviously somewhat easier, as the research

interests and questions had become more focused and, as a researcher, I had also grown in the process.

In narrative research, the researcher is a part of the storytelling environment, that shapes the content and style of what is narrated, because it has an effect on the narrator (Gubrium & Holstein 2008). During the interview, respondents are not simply voicing prepared answers or sharing memories; rather they are working in unison with the interviewer to produce a narrative (Gubrium & Holstein 2012). Put succinctly, who-tells-what-to-whom plays a central role in what is narrated. A story is a co-production of the narrator and the listener(s); stories are produced during the interviews for the researcher, meaning that they did not exist in a similar form before the moment of narration. Because the researcher him/herself plays a role in the composition of these subjective realities, the data produced in narrative research is not clean in the traditional sense, and it is not possible for two researchers to elicit identical stories from the same participant (Spector-Mersel 2010a). The researcher is also seen as a storyteller in his or her own right, choosing how to interpret and report the stories used in the research. Typically, researchers add their own socio-historically unique voice to the mix, and as the primary tool of inquiry, researchers need to be self-aware, self-reflective and able to identify what parts of the research material come from the researcher, from the participant and/or from the interaction between the two (Josselson 2007).

More important than what I am and where I come from as such is what I am in relation to the participating teachers and the field of research (in Japan) and the difference they make in the research and its various relationships. I had to cross many different narrative grounds when interacting with the participating teachers, bridging expectations and trying to understand one other in the interviews, and then producing and analysing the research material. In one way, this is a description of the process of becoming part of the bigger narrative with my own experiences and negotiating my relation to the stories told to me during the interviews. The conceptual division of 'emic' and 'etic' approaches used in anthropology is a useful descriptor of my research. 'Emic' refers to the local beliefs and perceptions, in this case the way in which teachers talk about their lives and work, whereas 'etic' prioritises the ethnographer's perceptions and interpretations (Kottak 2008). If put into narrative terms they would represent the participants voice and researcher's voice respectively (Spector-Mersel 2010a). The people of any given culture are those who know what is significant in what they do and think, but because there are limitations to just relying on the emic categories of knowledge, there is need to

shift to the etic categories which are seen as more distanced and objective interpretations of any given cultural phenomenon (Kottak 2008).

In the setting of my research there are many tensions concerning familiarity and strangeness, the most obvious being the fact that I was conducting research in a foreign culture using a non-native language. However, the research interviews and interactions with teachers and students in the schools were not simply a dialogue between people from two different countries; there were other dimensions involved, such as researcher-teacher relationships, and differences in age and gender. Some of these factors clearly had an influence, in some cases, on how I was treated in the schools and how the relationship with the participants developed, though in other cases, it mattered less. For example, I believed I arrived with an advantage because my native land of Finland has a good reputation and is known for high-quality education.

Both being educated as a primary school teacher and having experience as a practicing teacher was very useful when conducting a research study such as this. My first-hand teaching experience helped when building a trusting relationship with the participating teachers and making sense of their stories. When the teachers I interviewed found out I was a teacher myself they always seemed to relax a bit and typically, after the official part was over we would talk about Finnish education and culture, which seemed to be of particular interest to those working in education field in Japan. In addition, my teaching background ensured that I would not be labelled a naïve and idealistic researcher who knew nothing about real school dynamics and whose opinions carried no weight (Moje 2000).

I had been studying the Japanese language since 2005, had passed the highest proficiency test level and had lived in Japan previously, but conducting the research in a Japanese university setting and interviewing the teachers using only Japanese was still very challenging, because knowing the words does not guarantee understanding of all the connotations and deeper cultural meanings that they carry. Nonetheless, although my language skills may not have been flawless all the time, conducting the interviews in the teachers' native language was an advantage because I did not have to resort to using an interpreter. Being able to speak directly to me in their native language perhaps helped them feel more at ease, and I believe this allowed me to get closer to the teachers.

When telling stories, people are typically doing status work: participants of this research, for example, are presenting themselves as certain kinds of (beginning) teachers (Gubrium & Holstein 2008). The stories are always told to someone and with certain narrative aims. In this case, I, as a researcher was the concrete audience,

but because the narration took place in a formal interview setting, the teachers likely also spoke to an imagined third audience, a so-called “superlistener” (Hyvärinen & LyöTTYniemi 2005). People in Japan are often said to strongly differentiate between their public and private selves and modify expressions in regards to this split. Similarly, in narrative research, the production of knowledge is understood as a joint and process affected by contextual factors of the immediate interaction process.

The stories, with all the limitations and possibilities that they involve, were produced for me to use in this research. At times when the narration was a bit too clean and cautious, with the teachers avoiding getting too personal and talking about certain topics, I was clearly an outsider but, at other times, I was part of an in-group (a fellow teacher). Some teachers explicitly mentioned that it was easier to talk to me directly and earnestly – because I was a foreign researcher and, thus, essentially an outsider. I think that the teachers felt free to express themselves openly because as I was not planning to publish anything in Japanese, so things they said would be distanced from them and they would experience dissonance associated with feelings of being exposed socially (see Kitayama *et al.* 2004). The need to represent oneself in such a manner was not as strong in private discussions or in the research context, where their stories would remain anonymous. This became evident when I compared these interviews with the way that beginning teachers spoke about their work in articles appearing in various publication: When Japanese beginning teachers told about their work in their own name, they had a tendency to credit their older colleagues, the *senpai* for their successes and did not take credit for themselves (Satô & Yamazaki 2012). Even though the interviews were conducted with strict confidentiality at the K-school, because of the simple fact I personally knew all the teachers, the beginning teachers likely perceived that there was a possibility of some (imagined) social repercussion for failing to credit the seniors similarly in the culturally expected manner. The same phenomenon was not as observable in other interviews.

I always started the interviews by thanking the teachers for sparing their time<sup>1</sup> for the interview and asked whether they would mind if the interview were recorded. Interviews proceeded in a discussion-like manner, where I would ask prepared questions about some themes based on research interests of the larger research project, ‘Disentangling the Emotional Dimension in Beginning Teachers’ Work’

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<sup>1</sup> Japanese beginning teachers are notoriously busy, and my interview participants were no exceptions: some beginning teachers’ days lasted from 7.30 am to 9 pm, and many also worked on weekends.



(EMOT)<sup>2</sup>, and also related to aims set for my own research. These prepared questions were used to evoke narration in case themes of interest did not emerge spontaneously. Apart from those introductory moments, I took the position of an active listener and used verbal and non-verbal cues to show respect and understanding toward their stories. The themes of interests concerned the relationships and emotions in teachers' everyday professional lives. This interview style was selected based on the understanding that by allowing people to narrate their lives and experiences, it is possible to diminish the power differences inherent in interviews (Elliot 2005) and, thus, enhance the rapport and create an atmosphere conducive to more relaxed narration. Many of the teachers also questioned me about Finnish education and also more personal matters, which was perfectly acceptable to me, as this type of exchange is important for fostering the researcher-participant relationship in narrative research. Whenever I thought it was appropriate, I also volunteered information about my own teaching experiences to diminish any emotional distance between us.

I tried to avoid talking about theoretical aspects of the research, which are typically not well received by people participating in scientific interviews (Ruopasa 2016). Even though every interview was unique and the narration flowed naturally as a result of what the sphere of immediate interaction, *i.e.* the relationship between me and the teachers, was like, there were connecting themes in each first interview and everyone was asked two specific questions. Each participant's interview began with a request for them to narrate their journey to where they were sitting at the moment; *i.e.* how they became teachers. The second common question, which was asked toward the end of the session, was a request for them to mention three job-related events that involved "positive" and "negative" emotions (in that order).

Teachers were asked to set aside two hours to ensure that the interviews were not rushed and would not need to be stopped abruptly. Typically, the interviews lasted for 60 to 70 minutes, ended naturally when the stories for that day had been told. Each interview was recorded using a digital device and, in addition to that, I also kept notes of the interviews, noting the place where the interviews were completed, along with other information that might be useful later when interpreting the interviews. This 'other material' included facial expressions, gestures and contextual notes. One of the interviews was conducted via Skype<sup>3</sup>, but

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<sup>2</sup> This project was led by Eila Estola and funded by the Academy of Finland (Grant no. 265974).

<sup>3</sup> Popular way of participating in Internet-based video chats at the time the research was conducted.

this electronic means did not seem to change the experience significantly from those conducted in person.

Nine of the 16 beginning teachers participating in the research were interviewed twice. The remaining seven beginning teachers were not interviewed a second time mostly because of scheduling difficulties. Additionally, some teachers, seemed either a bit uncomfortable with the interview situation in general or did not like talking at length, though none verbalised this directly. Their discomfort contributed to my decision to limit their participation.

Second interviews began with a review of the summarised version of the first interview transcript that included some initial interpretations. The teachers corrected some misunderstandings and things I had simply misheard when transcribing and interpreting their stories. Participants were more relaxed during the second interview, and generally we spoke less about the study itself. Conducting two interviews with each teacher provided plenty of material for the purposes of the thesis, and no complementary production of research material was required.

Because participating teachers are introduced in articles based on their interviews, I will provide no additional detail here. Most interviewees were teachers with an average of four years' experience in medium-sized schools (300–500 students) in two major urban centres. Except for the one first-year teacher, all had taught in more than one school and, so, had experience in differing environments with differing colleagues and administrators. The gender distribution of teachers interviewed was roughly even and, collectively, most subjects taught in elementary and junior high level were represented. All of the teachers participating in the research had graduated from universities with undergraduate degrees, and two were enrolled in master's degree programmes during the period when the interviews were conducted. Some teachers had been working in non-teaching-related fields or had done post-graduate research before becoming teachers. Of the 16 beginning teachers participating in the research, four had yet to pass the teacher service examination at the time of the interviews.

#### ***4.2.1 Getting into the field – involvement with the K-School***

Levi McLaughlin (2010) has said that all research in Japan is basically fieldwork for a foreign researcher, because no matter what is being studied, the researcher must learn to navigate unfamiliar social protocols to be successful. Based on the experiences shared by others who have done ethnographic research about Japanese schools (Ahn 2014), I assumed that it would be difficult to gain access regardless

of qualifications. My first months in Japan passed quickly as I adjusted to independent life in a foreign country and to my new role as a research student. I had some time and energy to spare for making contacts within the teaching field, but things moved a lot slower than I had expected, and many initially promising contacts never yielded school visits or interviews. I knew that having a go-between, someone who could act a trustful link between the field and me, would be necessary (McLaughlin 2010), but little did I know to what extent this would be helpful. Instead benefitting from careful planning and execution, and my long involvement with K-school, which was the hub of my research, my entry into a school originated with a fortuitous chat about my research in an art gallery opening. My exchange coincidentally happened to be with a teacher who welcomed me to visit her school.

Ruth Ahn (2014) relates that it took six years of involvement with a particular junior high school to be given her own desk in the staff room, signifying her status-shift from outsider to insider. Knowing this, I was delighted when I was treated almost immediately as a staff member with my own desk and a listing on the directory outside the staff room. I took actively participated in all types of activities in the school, assisting teachers whenever I could, chatting with them during their free moments, and spending time with them (by invitation) at their formal and informal gatherings. There were obviously limits to which discussions I was allowed to hear and not having intimate knowledge on all the aspects of teachers work set limits to my study and made me an outsider on one hand. However, I was also an insider to a certain degree. This is quasi-insider status provided me with a certain confidence that I was able to hear (some of) their real concerns. The Japanese have a tendency to not open up non-members of their in-group and, with outsider, they generally only engage in polite conversation about unimportant or safe topics. As mentioned earlier, whether you are an “uchi” (inside) or “soto” (outside) member determines the depth and style of information provided by a participant.

I spent approximately one-and-a-half months (between February and April 2014) observing daily happenings and activities at the school and getting to know the teachers. A great deal methodology planning and research material production occurred during this initial stay. After that I visited the school two or three days per month, oftentimes during special occasions like Sports days and the like, or simply to talk with the teachers. I also spent time with teachers outside of school, participating in informal gatherings where I would drink, eat and socialise as one of them in a relaxed atmosphere. When at the school, I tried not to interfere in there, but I offered to help them to the best of my capabilities. The teachers grew

accustomed to my presence, and they often mentioned that they had forgotten that I was not actually employed there.

The city where K-school is located is characterised by having very few beginning teachers among their many schools. In this area of Japan, it is customary to place beginning teachers in schools in outlying communities. This, in a sense, rewards experienced teachers by them getting placed in more central and therefore desirable schools. The other major city where I conducted the research was known for its high teacher attrition (due to fierce competition) and, as a result, many young teachers were employed there. In previous research on Japanese schools Yuu (1988) identified four types of teacher cultures based on the location and age of the school. Each culture had distinctively different styles of collegial interaction. One is the 'content type' there is trust and satisfaction in the relationships between teachers and administration, and communication flows both formally and informally. Senior teachers take an active role in fostering beginning teachers. This culture type is typically found in schools in established city centres where transfers to those schools were likened to a promotion. The K-school is a good example of this kind of content teacher community.

My involvement and at K-school and my research style there has parallels to the tradition of narrative inquiry pioneered by Jean Clandinin, Michael Connelly and people in their research group. In narrative inquiry, researchers insert themselves into the lives of the research subjects and interact with them, composing and recomposing stories as the research unfolds (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Unlike many other approaches, narrative inquiry neither starts with a realist, constructionist or postmodern position nor does it constrict itself to a pre-determined theoretical framework. Instead, it builds understanding from within the inquiry process itself and from the experiences it evokes (Caine *et al.* 2013). I had some ideas that guided what I looked for and what I saw when in the school and when talking with the teachers, but I did not tie myself into theory. Instead, I remained focussed on the relationships with the people I was interacting with, following the principle that the main interest is in the way people live and tell their stories. In the process of simultaneously producing and analysing the research material, thinking and writing about what the teachers had told me and what I experienced with them in the school, I began hearing dissonance in the voices around me – beginning teachers' stories about their work were framed differently than senior teachers' stories.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasise that the field notes of narrative inquirers always include interpretation and, thus, are closer to reconstructions than

just being a passive recording of what actually took place. I often wrote up field notes after the interaction or situation occurred, which gives even greater credence to the reconstruction comparison, because I had to rely on my memory and understanding of the things going on around me. Listening to conversations taking place in Japanese, while taking notes in Finnish (unless there was something of special interest in the Japanese words or expressions themselves), the process of translation in itself is an act of interpretation (Temple & Koterba 2009). What a researcher observes and records as meaningful is not as clear-cut as one might assume in a study like this. School as a setting in itself is nearly universally familiar and, in my case, having a teaching background made it even more familiar. However, many argue that for a researcher doing inquiry in the school context and its phenomena as an object of research, can be considered a 'foreign/unfamiliar culture' (Coffey 2005, Fujita *et al.* 1995). Whilst many things in education are universal, and similar phenomena and ways of thinking and acting can be found everywhere, there were, of course, many issues that were new and different for me. Because I had familiarised myself with Japanese teachers' work through literature and stories from my master's thesis, I had to struggle to see many things and create new ways of understanding what was going on, not just in the field, but also when interpreting the stories during the analysis (Coffey 2005). Even with insider knowledge on culture and society at large or, more narrowly, the teaching profession and schools, the researcher is always an outsider in the particular school/social context (s)he is researching.

#### **4.3 Working with three languages – notes on transcription and interpretation**

My research was conducted using a mix of three languages: Japanese, English and Finnish. Japanese was the language used during interviews, interacting with teachers in the field and living everyday life in Japan. Also, interviews were first transcribed in Japanese. Discussions with my supervisors and co-authors were done in Finnish, and it was also the language I used to write up field notes because my native proficiency enabled me to take notes quickly. And, English is the language in which these research results are written and published, which accounts for the third language of this study. Translating from one language to another risks misinterpretation and loss of nuance because the words and concepts change when moving to a different language context, so the challenges of working in three languages cannot be minimised.

Though operating in three different languages was tiring and confusing from time to time, there were also clear merits to the situation. I was forced to think over theoretical concepts and culture-specific words and their meanings countless of times. Compared to conducting the research using just one language and within one culture, there was a greater need to careful and precise explanation in the language of the individuals who were unfamiliar with them. For my Finnish colleagues, I explained the Japanese expressions and cultural themes, and for my seminar group at Hokkaido University, where participants came from different research traditions, the principles of narrative research and the concept of micropolitics and micropolitical environment also needed careful translation.

One important language-related aspect of research, where frequent culture crossing happens, concerns how the language represents local and cultural realities (Young 2009). Terminology related to this type of research comes mainly from academic discourse conducted in English, which usually cannot be directly translated into or the Japanese academic discourse, and it can become even less translatable in a fieldwork setting. This required me to be very mindful of nuances tied to, for example, various words for affectual experiences (emotion, feeling, affect, sensation). The definition and meaning of “emotion” in English carries different connotations than the word *kanjō* (感情) or *jōdō* (情動), which are typically found in translation dictionaries as words for emotion (Matsumoto 1996). It has been suggested that the *emōshon* (emotion) romanisation<sup>4</sup> should be used instead, because it is familiar to those who are versed in the academic discourse on emotions. However, labels used to emotions like anger and sadness are cultural artefacts of the English language and should not be used as culture-free analytical tools (Wierzbicka 1994). This means that emotions referred to with same label are experienced, expressed and emphasised differently between different cultures (Markus & Kitayama 1994). In some cases, there is no equivalent of a given English emotion in other languages, and Japanese is no exception. However, it is important to remember that the lack of word does not mean that people do not experience that emotion (Matsumoto 1996). Between English and Japanese language there are several emotions that do not have exact translations and must be defined conceptually. Throughout the research, I avoided using emotional labels whenever possible, instead giving space to the participants’ emotionally charged story. When teachers themselves named emotions, I provided their meaning in the Japanese context if they differed significantly from their English counterparts.

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<sup>4</sup> Writing Japanese using the alphabet instead of Japanese characters.

When transcribing the interviews in Japanese I changed the names of the teachers immediately to protect their identities. In Articles I and III, my co-authors and I chose to refer to the teachers by their pseudonyms and the honorific title of *sensei* (先生) (lit. the one born before another), because it carries a lot of cultural significance and because we also wanted to be sensitive to such cultural differences. Some Japanese concepts that do not have any corresponding English words were left written in Japanese, and a detailed explanation was included in the footnotes or endnotes (Article I). After the transcriptions were completed, I wrote summarised versions of each interview, which were shared with and analysed by co-authors, in either Finnish or English depending on who I was working with. It is suggested that qualitative research findings should be written in a way that allows the reader of the report to understand the research material as it was expressed in the source language (Nes *et al.* 2010). To accomplish this, for quotations used in the articles, I inserted the original Japanese utterance and tried to capture the essence of what the teachers wanted to convey in their story instead of going for a literal translation. I tried to stay as true to the original as possible but, obviously, there is always risk of nuances getting lost in translation. I had quite a good command of the language, having studied it for eight years and having attained the highest proficiency level, but I checked my understanding of more nuanced and complicated utterances with native speakers to ensure that I did not miss something that is apparent only to a native speaker. Ensuring translation accuracy is crucial in narrative research, because the method's reliability and the quality of the report depend on it, and it is also important for the transparency of the research process (Mertova & Webster 2007).

The language used in a research situation has implications on the power dynamics within the relationship that develops between the researcher and participants. Those who are on their linguistic home ground have the advantage (Brännlund *et al.* 2013). Because I conducted the interviews in what is my fifth language and the participants' native language, the teachers had more control over the flow of the discussion than they would have if the interviews were conducted in 'neutral' language like English.

Translating stories told in the interviews is not a simple process of transferring meaning from the words of one language to those of another, with the researcher acting as mediator between two cultures. In fact, through his or her unique socio-cultural positioning, the researcher is actually a re-constructor of these cultures (Temple & Koterba 2009). I did do some "narrative smoothing" (Polkinghorne 1995), which means deleting hesitations, unnecessary repetitions and breaks. The

structure of Japanese utterances and the order of grammatical terms in a sentence differ greatly between Japanese and English. Therefore, when translating direct quotations, I took the liberty to aim for closest expression that carries the same meaning instead of using direct word to word translation which would have been clumsy and difficult to understand for the reader. The following example illustrates this process.

Original Japanese sentence (Japanese letters):

「いい経験はちょこちょこありますけど、そんな、何と云えばいいですかね  
……普段の日常生活で子供が言ってくれた何気ない一言とかそういうのは、  
いつも嬉しいですよね」

Original Japanese sentence (romanisation):

‘Ii keiken ha chokochoko arimasukedo, sonna, nantoieba iidesukane ... fudan no nichijō seikatsu de kodomo ga ittekureta nanigenai hitokoto toka souiu no ha itsumo ureshii desuyone.’

Direct translation in English:

‘Good experiences, every now and then there are, like ... how to put it well. Ordinary everyday life in the casual things children say or such, always very happy (as you know).’

Translation into more natural English:

‘There are good experiences every now and then, like ... how should I put it well ... the casual things the children say in the ordinary everyday work and such always make me very happy.’

Japanese is a pro-drop language, meaning that its speakers do not say things that are obvious in the context, but as English does not work in the same way I sometimes had to add pronouns and references to people who were not directly mentioned in the original utterance. In many cases this is either the subject or actor who, in other languages, would be referred to with pronouns (Makino & Tsutsui 2007). Japanese language also does not have relative pronouns, which can further make it difficult to know who is being referred to when analysing the stories. In the example above the teacher does not directly say “I” and the grammar used to refer to happiness is ambiguous enough to allow the interpretation to refer to teachers’ work in general. Since the topic of the discussion was related to her personal



experiences, I interpreted it as her talking about her own emotion. Even though in many cases the context of the story provided a means to figure out the right translation/interpretation, there were a few instances where I later asked the teacher for clarification. In Japanese culture, there is a tendency not to name persons in conversation unless they are the focus of the communication. (This communication style is meant to keep the focus on what is happening, *i.e.* the message (Rubin 1998). The Japanese people are very reluctant to draw unnecessary attention to themselves.) Another feature that makes interpreting Japanese sentences challenging is identifying the topic of the sentence in cases where it is not explicitly mentioned. This feature is used when the topic is apparent to the speaker and the listener, when it is known from preceding conversations, or when it is connected to instant sensory information (Makino & Tsutsui 2007.) Because of this, occasionally things that seemed obvious during the interview were difficult to recall when reading the transcript.

The culture's interdependent orientation (introduced in Subchapter 3.1) can be observed at the level of language: In Japanese it is difficult to say anything without taking a stance toward both the content of the expression as well as the relationship between the interlocutor and the recipient (Kondo 1990, Suzuki 2006). Put another way, the way something is said and what it tells about the relationships between the people involved is more important than the content of the message (Kondo 1990). When the participants of this research told about other teachers, the expressions used were revealing about the nature of the relationship. A very polite and reverent way of referring to a colleague reveals a vertical relationship. If the speaker humbles him/herself or raises the person being discussed to a higher status through use of certain polite verbs or nouns, it signifies that the person speaking is assuming a lower status toward the addressee or the object of the conversation. However, if less-polite and direct verbs are used, a closer relationship between the two is implied. All the teachers used a formal politeness level during the interviews when addressing me and throughout most of their narration, although when appropriate, they changed to a more informal register. In the following example, the linguistic markers used by a beginning teacher to explain her relationships with the school principals of the school illustrate the Japanese consciousness about the possible consequences of their expressions on their social standing:

Original Japanese sentence (Japanese letters):

「ちょっと失礼な言い方かもしれないですけど、同じ仕事仲間だなと感じさせてくれることが多い」

Original Japanese sentence (romanisation):

‘Chotto shitsureina iikata kamoshirenai desukedo, onaji shigoto nakama dana to kanjisasete kureru koto ga ôi.’

English translation:

‘It might be a bit rude way of putting it, but I’m allowed to feel like they are just comrades (colleagues) doing the same work.’

The teacher begins by letting me know that what she is about to say may be considered an impolite way of describing the principals of the school, who are usually referred to by their proper titles *kôchô-sensei* (校長先生) (principal) or *kyôtô-sensei* (教頭先生) (vice principal). The word *nakama* (仲間) can be translated as a colleague, but is more often used when referring to friend or comrades, while the polite word for colleague is *dôryô* (同僚).

#### 4.4 The analysis

There is no single agreed upon way to analyse narrative research material, which leads to every researcher essentially choosing one that best fits the research question, the research material produced and the purposes of the research. Yet, there are shared principles among the different approaches on the ontological and epistemological levels. In accord with the narrative paradigm, I understand the production of the research material, the analysis and reporting the research to form a whole in which the individual processes blend together (Spector-Mersel 2010a). When analysing stories, researchers are reading not only the texts themselves, but they are also considering their contexts and linking them to stories and texts produced by others – including, of course, those by other researchers. As is typical for narrative research, the process was very inductive: With a very broad research interest, I set out to listen to the stories focussing on relational, micropolitical and emotional dimensions. Reading the stories for Article I, which were focused on the teacher-student relationships, led my co-author and I to select three stories with the richest narration and most impactful critical incidents. Further readings led us to examine the teacher-student relationship narrations against other elements of the teachers’ stories, which were analysed as in their entirety, and that allowed us to

identify various sources for tension in the relationships. In Article I, it was the different parts of the stories that started to reveal interesting dissonances and led to exploring the idea of identifying tensions between the different dimensions within the stories themselves.

When we found dissonance between the voices in the beginning teachers' interview stories and the voices of the senior teachers in various discussions as a part of my ethnographic involvement in the K-school, we realised that delving deeper into the emerging conflict and listening to multiple voices would be fruitful. It was at that point that we decided to interview the senior teachers as well. This was a great departure from the original plan of listening to just the voices of the beginning teachers, and it illustrates the inductive nature of the research process quite well. Regardless of the specific analysis method chosen, narrative scholars typically operate on two levels with the texts: 1) they examine what the texts are about (the *what*-question) and 2) they examine the surroundings and the context of the narratives (the *why*-question). The latter facilitates explanation of the 'what' part of the narratives by opening up various contexts of narrating and the culture where the narratives are embedded (Spector-Mersel 2014).

Analysis for the thesis articles began with me working alone on the raw interview data in their untouched Japanese form. During this initial stage, I had discussions with the co-authors and supervisors during which we talked about the interesting possible readings of the research material and foci for the articles. Based on these discussions, I translated relevant parts of the teachers' storied interviews into English to be analysed by co-authors. Because the field notes had been written in Finnish, there was no need to translate them. Instead there was a need to compile all the useful extracts into one condensed whole. Compilation of field notes used mainly for Article II, consisted of 42 pages (A4) of text. From these field notes, only approximately 10 pages of extracts of most significant senior–beginning teacher dynamics were chosen for closer analysis (see Article II for details).

The individual articles that are part of this thesis were co-productions in which each writer participated in both the analysis and writing process. The analysis was dialogical process among the authors; I was the first author, having been most immersed in the research material. The method of analysing the narrative research material differed depending on the needs of the individual articles. For Article I, we conducted a holistic content analysis (Riessman 2008) on the stories of three beginning teachers and, by reading about the teacher–student relationship along with other dimensions of the story, such as the collegial relationships or the teachers' personal histories, we found three different ways of talking about tensions in the

teacher–student relationships (Spector-Mersel 2010b.) In Article II we analysed the stories of not just the beginning teachers, but also those of their seniors. Through this approach we were able to bring out aspects of beginning teachers’ work that would otherwise have gone unnoticed (Gudmundsdottir 2001). For the stories in Article III, we did a categorical content analysis resembling more traditional qualitative content methods (Polkinghorne 1995, Zilber *et al.* 2008).

For Article I, the analysis was done jointly by co-author Minna Uitto and me from the very beginning. With the other two articles, I did most of the analysis independently, and the co-authors joined in later stages of analysis and writing. Cooperative inquiry while physically being located in a country with a six- to seven-hour time difference would have been difficult in an earlier era, but through frequent emailing and teleconferencing we maintained a productive research relationship. Interactions with my dissertation supervisors were also carried out in the same manner. During the two-and-a-half years that I spent in Japan to conduct the research, I returned to Finland twice (June 2014 and March 2015) to participate in activities of the EMOT-project and to engage in extensive consultation with supervisors and co-authors. These two visits were really important for giving shape to and progressing with the individual thesis articles.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

When dealing with personal experiences through stories that refer to significant actors, there are many ethical issues that have to be taken into account. Due to the strongly personal and sometimes intrusive nature of narrative research a different ethical approach is needed than for studies in which people are regarded simply as just producers of research material (Smythe & Murray 2000). I sought informed consent from the participants, letting them know about the nature of the research, explaining how their stories would be used and emphasising that if they wished to do so they could withdraw from the research at any point. Regarding practical issues such as anonymity and confidentiality, I explained that they would be handled with care. In narrative research, the caring ethical attitude should encompass the whole research process (Elbaz-Luwisch 2005).

Another distinguishing feature of narrative research is that participants are seen as active agents who are tightly connected to what is being studied. In this approach, it is not uncommon for researchers to share control of the interpretation and writing of the narrative research report with participants (Spector-Mersel 2010a). In my research, I invited the teachers back to discuss the interpretations and offered them

the opportunity to change or comment on the articles before publication. Unfortunately, many of the teachers were too busy in their work or felt uncomfortable with the language (English) of the manuscripts to comment about my interpretations, even though I provided them with short Japanese summaries. Also, they were not really worried about how their voices and stories were represented in the research just as long as the stories would not be recognisable or attributable to them. There were few occasions when the teachers explicitly said that they did not want certain parts of their stories used; typically, these were details that could make them vulnerable or compromise their position in the school community. In these cases, I honoured their wishes and deleted the worrisome parts. Ensuring that participants do not experience any repercussions or harm is an important part of the researcher's ethical obligation to the participants and to the research process as a whole (Josselson 2007). The verbal consent granted by each teacher before the first interview represents an explicit contract, but more important than that is the implicit contract representing the trust and rapport built between the researcher and participants. As the storytelling becomes more disclosive and intimate, the researcher's obligation to treat the stories with respect and understanding deepens (Josselson 2007).

As mentioned earlier, because the participating teachers were speaking in their native language and were in full control of their self-narration, they held power position in the interview situation. However, I, as the researcher have the final say in how they are represented so I must be mindful of the power balance and aim to present the participant's stories fairly and accurately (Brännlund *et al.* 2013). Respecting the participants' voices is extremely important in narrative research, and it is widely agreed that the voices of the narrators should be clearly present, especially in the form of long quotes in their own words (Riessman & Speedy 2007).



## 5 The articles

This thesis consists of three independent research articles published (or in press) in international peer reviewed journals (see Appendix 6). Each article is a distinct sub-study with its own focus and method of analysis. The articles are summarized here in the order they were written.

### 5.1 The tensions between the ideal and experienced: teacher–student relationships in stories told by beginning Japanese teachers

This article was written by Minna Uitto and me. We studied stories told by beginning Japanese teachers in narrative interviews. The article focuses on the tensions the teachers described in relationships with students regarding differences in viewpoints about ideals and ask: *what do beginning teachers tell about the tensions between the ideal and experienced in their teacher–student relationships?* It focuses on the teachers' telling about those relationships in the micropolitical and relational environment of their schools. It also explores the types of emotions associated with these. The analysis consisted of reading all of the stories with a focus on what was told about the teacher-student relationship, and choosing three of the most illustrative stories for further analysis. Through re-reading the individual stories holistically and looking for connections among different dimensions within the stories, we looked for ways in which the tensions in the teacher-student relationships are connected to the school environment, particularly its immediate micropolitical and relational context, but we also illustrated how the tensions are connected to wider cultural dimensions such as *senpai-kôhai* (senior-junior) relationships.

The cultural ideal of creating and nurturing emotionally close relationships with one's students through being open and spending a lot of time with them is present in the stories of the three teachers, as everyone said that their career choice was related to their interest in children. However, none of the teachers were consistently able to conduct their work in a manner that corresponded to this ideal, which was a source of tensions. Each of the three teachers told about experiences in which they could not connect with or were distanced from their students, which was a situation they were not pleased with.

The lack of an ideal connection with students had different origins for each of the three teachers. *Sumitani-sensei* attributed his less-than-ideal connection with

the students to his having set overly high-standards for his relationship with the students that were based on his own experiences with childhood teachers and the model set by his colleagues. For *Arai-sensei* it was the presence of her (senior) colleagues being directly involved in the situation or that the rules and ethos of the schools she worked in did not allow her to work an ideal way. When other colleagues were around she felt that she could not work using her *honne* (true emotions) and felt disconnected. For *Sekiguchi-sensei* it was the decisions and actions by those in power in the schools and relationships with individual students that affected the relationship with the whole class.

In conclusion, the tensions that were present in the stories of beginning teachers about their relationships with students were all connected to the working conditions of the school's micropolitical context. Moreover, all these tensions involved the significant actors within the school, most importantly other teachers, who could be on the ideal side as inspiring examples for the teachers while enforcing the cultural model of close relationships, or they could be on the side of experience, as a central actor in the micropolitical conditions of the schools. In particular, senior teachers are a strong force shaping the workplace culture in Japanese schools, as shown both in our own and previous research (Miyajima 2008).

## **5.2 Relationship tensions among beginning and senior teachers**

Article II, written by me, Minna Uitto and Eila Estola and me, studies relationships between the beginning and senior teachers in the K-School, a Japanese junior high school. To examine this relationship in the school's micropolitical context, we asked: *What kind of tensions characterise the relationships between beginning and senior teachers?*

By analysing the different ways that beginners themselves told about their work and how the seniors described the beginning teachers, we illustrate the tensions in the relationships with the senior teachers. The results showed that these tensions are connected to the contradictory expectations placed on the beginning teachers, to the positions and roles beginning teachers have in the teacher community and how beginning teachers understand the nature of their work. These tensions are also connected to the teachers' varying professional interests regarding their work. Furthermore, these tensions influence both the work of the beginners and the senior teachers, but in different ways. The tensions are also connected strongly to different expectations (on proper actions and attitudes) and assumptions. These expectations and assumptions are micropolitical by nature in the sense that



they are not openly discussed, so beginning teachers have to make guesses on how to act properly as they negotiate the workplace (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002, Uitto *et al.* 2015).

The first tension of (in)dependence is connected to the expectation that beginning teachers act independently as full-blown members of the school and the reality that they must rely on their seniors on many issues. Complicating the matter is that on one hand, there is an ethos of equity in Japanese schools and, thus, teachers do not thus directly comment on each other's work (Makino & Tsutsui 1999). And on the other hand, learning to teach and developing pedagogical skills is understood to happen through the guidance of more experienced teachers (Shimahara 2002). Based on the stories, the beginning teachers seem to be both dependence and independence simultaneously. Beginning teachers have to make decisions concerning how, where and from whom to seek help in order to maintain good relationships with their seniors. Conversely, senior teachers seem to struggle with the cultural expectation that they are to guide and help beginners, but on the other hand professional ethos that says not to intrude on others' teaching and their knowledge on learning how to teach the best suggest that the beginners teachers need to be left to figure out things on their own.

The second tension involves obedience and assertiveness. Beginning teachers are expected by their seniors to contribute to the school's development, but due to their junior status, their voices are weak, and the situation is further complicated by the lack of mid-career teachers in Japan's urban areas. Beginning teachers are also expected to be more assertive and creative in their teaching and conduct, but due to younger generations not being used to meting out strict discipline and the fear of negative consequences, many teachers choose to assume a more non-assertive and safe position. For senior teachers, this tension was about deciding the best way to 'bring up' their juniors who belong to a generation that is also unaccustomed to taking disciplining as well. Based on the stories, the senior teachers face the dichotomy of knowing that disciplining their juniors is important for their professional growth and proper functioning of the school, while understanding that there is the possibility of harming more fragile beginning teachers in the process.

The third tension relates to the pull between the individual and cooperative tasks of the beginning teacher. The stories illustrate how these less-experienced teachers consider the main purpose of their work to be teaching the lessons and working for the students. However, the senior teachers focused more on how beginners should conduct themselves as part of the teacher community. The beginning teachers' responsibilities toward the cooperative management of the

school and working with other teachers in grade-level groups was time-consuming and took time away from important lesson planning. The expectations and the importance of working on behalf of the community are illustrated by a case in which a senior teacher reprimanded a beginning teacher for failing to complete a task due to illness. The younger teacher was reprimanded for not having the foresight to get a vaccination to prevent the illness, resulting in the task not being completed. Prior research has brought up how teachers are regularly expected to position professional and organisational interests before their self-interests (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002).

The tensions in the senior-beginner relationships are connected to the local context (immediate social field) as well as the broader cultural narrative of *senpai-kôhai* (senior–junior) relationships and the organisational life of Japanese schools. The article suggests that tensions provide a nurturing ground for professional growth, but if the beginning teachers do not have the means or enough support to deal with the tensions, they also carry the potential to lead to stress, burn-out and leaving the profession early (Wakimoto & Chôshi 2015). These kinds of tensions interwoven into teaching as a relational practice, and because they work both as a nurturing ground for professional growth as well as a source of stress and potential early attrition, teacher education programmes should help aspiring teachers develop the capacity to deal with them.

### **5.3 Storied emotional distances in the relationships between beginning teachers and school principals**

Article III was a product of me, Virpi Timonen, Minna Uitto and Eila Estola. In the article we focus on the relationship between beginning teachers and their principals and ask what kind of storied emotional distances are told in these relationships? The research material consisted of stories of each of the 16 participating beginning teachers. The analysis was conducted in several phases: 1) I introduced the content of the teachers' stories in a summarised form which we discussed amongst the writers, 2) we decided to focus on the beginning teacher–principal relationships, 3) I translated stories relevant to this focus into English, and we then read them jointly and, 4) we grouped the stories into three categories of “distance” and further analysed the stories using the concept of emotional geographies (Hargreaves 2001a). The results illustrate that relationships with the principal are often described as relatively distant and mainly experienced through the teacher community, though there were mentions of culturally appropriate situations in

which a principal created more direct and personal relationship with beginning teachers. The stories of the relationships informed us not only about personal aspects, but also about the organisational and cultural context that condition them.

Through their stories, beginning teachers revealed that they consider the principal to be like a parent who listens to their concerns and occasionally lightens the mood with a joke or having a non-work-related talk. These types of emotionally close, direct relationships with principals were regarded as very important. These exchanges took place either in the staff room, where the principal often spent time, or during informal gatherings that allowed for more relaxed interaction between members of different levels of the school hierarchy. Culturally, it is the principal who determines how close the relationship develops and is the one to initiate non-work-related discussions.

The results also illustrate how the Japanese principals do a lot of their work to support the beginning teachers behind the scenes. This was illustrated in two cases in which parental pressure was mounting on the beginning teachers due to the problems they were having in the classroom. In the first case, the principal allayed parents' concerns in a way that the teacher could continue to work without interference, and this was met with gratitude. In a second case, the principal sided more with the parents, and eventually removing the beginning teacher from the class, which was emotionally difficult for the aggrieved beginning teacher. These were examples of principals working as 'gatekeepers' (Kelchtermans *et al.* 2011), negotiating and balancing responsibilities both toward people inside and outside the school. In the teachers' stories, objectionable or despised principals mainly listened to outside concerns at the expense of their teachers. The lack of emotional understanding and widening of moral distance toward the principal was accompanied with negative emotions.

In Japanese schools, power is distributed between administrators and the teachers, all of whom play a big role in the cooperative management of the school. The school, as an organisation, is structured on vertical hierarchy, and teachers are also grouped by grade level taught in the staff room. Beginning teachers explained that these two circumstances made their closest colleagues the most important persons in their everyday work and that principals were usually approached directly in only the most difficult situations. It is significant that stories about the principal–beginning teacher relationships did not really come up until participants were asked about them specifically. Principals, however, can control the emotional politics of the school (Hargreaves 2008), and in the stories the principal was said to influence the emotional atmosphere of the teacher community. This, in turn, has great effect

on how teachers conduct themselves, because the role of collegial relationships is paramount for Japanese teachers (Shimahara 2002).

## **6 Main results of the research**

In this chapter, I present the main results of the research. The research revealed that tensions in beginning teachers' work arise in situations where, due to differing commitments and professional interests, beginning teachers struggle to balance their personal responsibilities and obligations and the broader narratives within their micropolitical environments. Many times the expectations toward beginning teachers can be contradictory or the beginning teachers have to assume stances contrary their wishes due to their organisationally and culturally lower position. Colleagues and the principal seem to play an important role as the key determiners of which broader narratives become significant in the micropolitical environment. The different positions teachers take toward these narratives, influenced by their moral commitments and personal professional interests, are often the catalyst for the tensions.

In this research, good working relationships with the senior colleagues were noted as the most important working condition for beginning teachers to nurture. Tensions in (collegial) relationships fell into two categories: 1) tensions originating from the junior and senior positions in collegial relationships and 2) tensions originating from the views on being a good (beginning) teacher. These tensions are presented here in separate categories to make discussion easier but as is typical of complex social phenomena, they are overlapping and partly embedded within each other (Berry 2008).

### **6.1 A methodologically guided new understanding of tensions**

Understanding the nature of the tensions in this research was greatly influenced by the narrative methodology utilised. In much of the earlier research on tensions in pre-service or beginning teachers' work, the methodological approach entailed asking the teachers about their experiences and have them reflect about their theories, beliefs and practices (Beach & Pearson 1998), or asking open-ended questions about tensions confronting beginning teachers and asking them to define them (Pillen *et al.* 2013). The focus in much of the earlier research has therefore been on perceptions and experiences of the individual teacher. Even though some of the tensions involve social relations, the underlying ontological understanding of tensions in the previous research has been that they are intra-subjective (something that happens within a person), something that belongs to the individual experiencing them. This ontological assumption is obvious from the suggested

ways to alleviate or cope with the tensions: They all involved individual reflection and adjusting personal beliefs about teaching (Beach & Pearson 1998). In my research, the methodological approach changed, partly because the original intention did not involve the examination of these tensions as such. Tensions were found through holistic and multidimensional reading of individual stories (Spector-Mersel 2010) in Article I, or via a multi-perspective view of one specific school as a micropolitical environment. Working on Article II enabled me to see that the tensions were closely tied to the relational dimension of the work, where the importance of the role of senior colleagues became clear. Boler (1999: 6) considers tensions to be ‘individualised phenomena localised in the interior self’, but it is important to note that, like emotions, they are socially constructed and from an individual interacting with his/her environment. Thus, they are strongly connected to the relational dimension of the work.

## **6.2 Tensions originating from the positions of junior and senior in the collegial relationships**

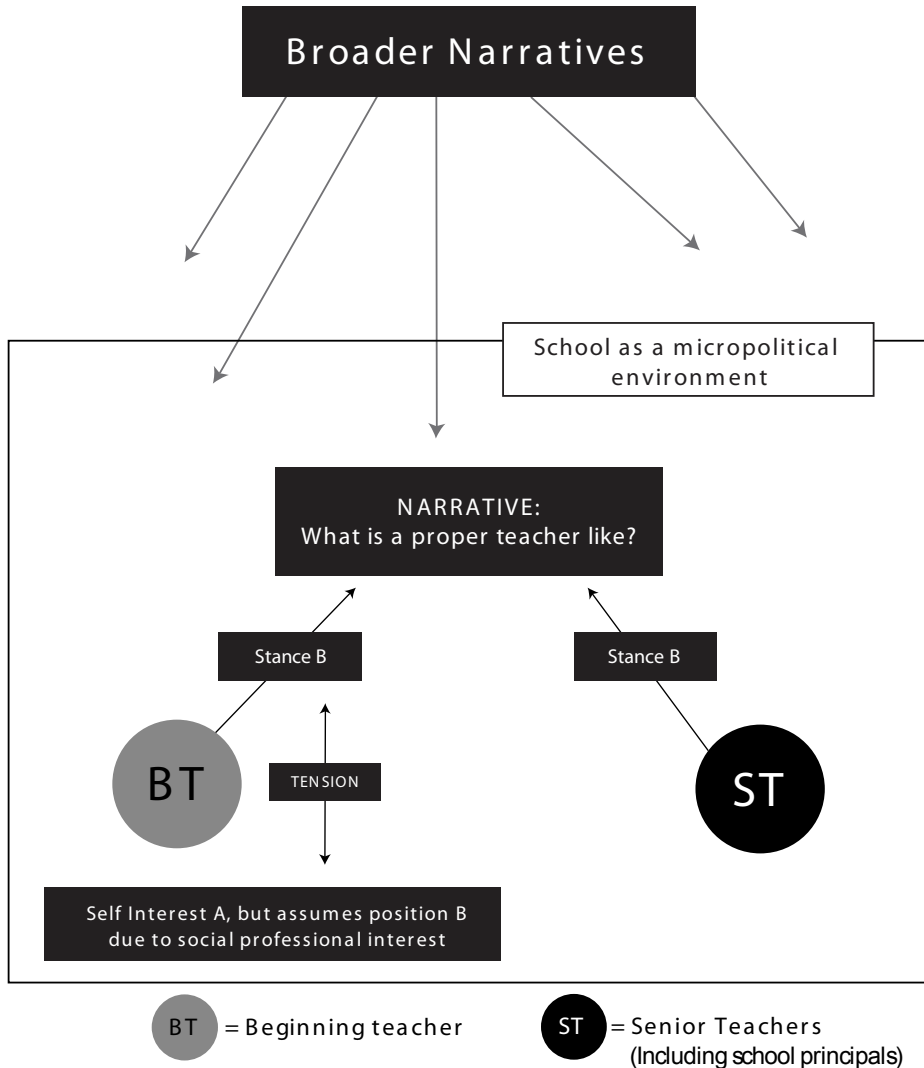
Colleagues not only play a vital role in shaping relationships in micropolitical environment of Japanese schools, they also play a significant role in how beginning teachers see their work. For Tirri and Husu (2002), ethical dilemmas (closely resembling what I refer to as tensions in this research) of the workplace dealt with human relationships and forced the teachers to mediate between conflicting private and public interests centred around the various views about what is in “the best interest of the child”. However, based on the articles of this research, the focal issue in many cases concerned what is in ‘the best interest of the teacher community and its functioning’. Moreover, the reason for tensions in beginning teachers’ work did not so much originate internally; rather, the catalyst was their designated position within the school organisation and their role in senior–junior relationships.

Article II highlighted that tensions appeared in regard senior colleagues’ ideas about the degree to which beginning teachers should function independently and the amount of assistance or guidance they should seek from their senior colleagues. These tensions were identified in earlier research, but with a greater focus on the individual teacher’s understanding his or her position culturally as being fairly independent, thus making it an intra-subjective issue (Beach & Pearson 1998). However, my research examined this tension through the prism of the teachers’ respective position of *senpai* and *kôhai* (senior and junior). The expectations on proper behaviour in these positions are culturally pervasive and constitute a broader

narrative that beginning teachers must negotiate time and time again in their work. Even though seen here as one of the broader narratives, the senior–junior relationship is actually not just that; rather, it is a dimension of the teachers’ work that is closely connected to how beginning teachers position themselves toward broader narratives by dint of senior teachers’ great influence on the beginning teachers work.

These senior–junior dynamics were present in each of the three teachers’ stories introduced in Article I and were behind the tension in the relationships the beginning teachers had with their students (see Subchapter 5.1 for details). In all of these stories, whether the senior teachers were admirable role models or their actions or presence influenced the beginning teachers, the impetus for the tensions is the same. The senior teachers are the ones who, due to their authoritative position, can question the beginners’ positioning toward broader narratives, and the beginning teachers often have no choice but to accept the new position that was forced on them, giving rise to tensions.

In Article I, a teacher said she wanted to exercise her real emotions in the workplace. She was a gentle type who did not like to raise her voice when teaching. However, her mentoring teacher often insisted that she get angry at the students and raise her voice. This conceptual schism in the what-is-best-for-the-students narrative sparked the tension. The tensions originate from issues of power: the pedagogical views of the beginning teacher often succumbed to the pressure to conform and maintain the position and role of a good junior teacher. In other words, the teachers were willing to sacrifice their self-interests in favour of the social professional relationship with their senior colleagues who are seen as providers of invaluable support and approval (see Article II). This mechanism is illustrated in the Fig. 2 below.



**Fig. 2. Tension occurring from the beginning teacher assuming an unwanted position**

The central role of colleagues in beginning teachers' work can also be heard in the stories about the beginning teachers' relationships with principals in Article III. Principals were not expected to exercise strong pedagogical leadership as much as to foster a cooperative consensus amongst the teachers of the school through various means in order to facilitate the beginning teachers work. The atmosphere and relationship-management that principals of the school control can also be



understood to be connected to tensions, as uniting teachers behind common goals requires agreement, which cannot be reached when relationships are really tense. The principal can be thus seen trying to get the teachers to assume the same non-conflicting position toward a given broader narrative. Tensions found in junior–senior relationships (discussed in Article II) are also relevant for the relationship between the beginning teacher and the principal, because they are all intertwined in the micropolitical environment of the school. However, the tensions with the principal are less potent than those with senior colleagues due to the greater emotional distance in political and professional geographies (Hargreaves 2001a) and their lesser prominence in the daily routine of the teachers (see Article III). The entire teacher community was also seen to affect beginning teachers’ relationship with the principal in the sense that beginning teachers would seldom take their problems directly to the principal, as they were expected to handle issues through their closest colleagues (see Article III).

Moving to a new environment, which is a common occurrence in the Japanese public education system due to its long-practiced policy of periodic transfers, forces the beginning teachers to renegotiate both their organisational position and stance toward broader narratives significant to the new micropolitical environment. A transferred teacher’s need to ‘reinvent’ him- or herself for the new workplace is also an incubator for tensions. When transferring to a new school, one of the three teachers whose story was highlighted in Article I had to retake the employment examination, because of the differing standards and culture. In addition, in his new school there were procedures that he considered to be gender-biased and old-fashioned. The old practice of taking roll-call in girl-boy order and the teaching community’s habit of referring to children with gender-specific expression seemed a bit strange to him, but incoming teachers with strong ideas about gender equality would be odds in this micropolitical environment, and tensions would likely emerge regarding tactfully dealing with the situation. This example also highlights that potentially volatile conditions do not always lead to tensions, as they are dependent on the background and beliefs of the teacher (Andô 2005).

In the understanding regarding the meaning of the senior–junior positions when it comes to guidance and mentoring, there are great differences among schools in Japan. This was revealed in a beginning teacher’s story in Article II about the difficulties she encountered in her new environment, because senior teachers did not assume a direct and critical stance toward her teaching to the degree that she had hoped. Her expectation was that they would be very interactive, whereas the senior teachers in the new locale believed it was better to allow beginners to

figure out things on their own. In this vignette, the divergent positions toward the broader narrative became a source of tension.

The stories in Article II imply that the traditional junior–senior (*senpai–kōhai*) positions in the schools are in flux. This became apparent from senior teachers’ stories about their uncertainty about how to discipline and advise the new ‘softer’ generation of beginning teachers. Beginning teachers obviously had no point of reference, but the senior teachers’ indecisiveness undoubtedly influenced the senior–junior relationship in many ways. In addition, the reduced number of mid-career teachers made creating good mentoring relationships challenging from time to time (see Article II). In previous research, the dominant understanding was that tensions are mainly experienced by the less powerful individual in the relationship, and that is most often the one with less seniority (Beach & Pearson 1998). However, as the results of Article II suggest, it is not the lack of experience or seniority per se that matters; it is the expectations toward one’s position that make a difference. Regardless of a senior teacher’s years on the job, he or she may be relatively inexperienced as a mentor and subject to possible questioning of actions in the new role (Kelchtermans 2005). Thus, tensions inhabit the senior teachers’ world as well. A similar point was raised in Berry’s (2008) research on teacher educators, whose pedagogical choices could be challenged by the student teachers.

Senior teachers and principals sometimes seem to be distant from beginning teachers in their everyday interactions due to the senior–junior positions, but this loosened during informal social gatherings that take place among the teachers somewhat frequently (see Article II). These social gatherings are also places where many of the tensions related to norms of social interaction in collegial relationships are loosened—if not altogether abandoned temporarily (Matsumoto 1996). On one hand they offer teachers opportunities to interact with each other without the otherwise dominating hierarchical system, but on the other hand, the temporary absence can underline the importance of the hierarchical relationships in the everyday work of beginning teachers.

### **6.3 Tensions originating from the views on being a good (beginning) teacher in the teacher community**

Colleagues essentially define what a ‘good teacher’ is and, thus, they have the power to call the beginning teacher’s professional identity and moral integrity into question. However, an amicable relationship also constitutes an important part of the beginning teacher’s good working conditions (Kelchtermans 1996, 2005).

Therefore, relationships with senior colleagues have a dimension that engenders caution in beginning teachers, because good collegial relationships are the key to a successful teaching career in the Japanese context.

One of the stories in Article I explained how the ‘good teacher’ ideal was internalised by a beginning teacher through involvement with teachers from his own youth and present day colleagues. In addition, Article II showed that senior teachers both implicitly and explicitly outlined expectations of beginning teachers by providing a definition of ‘a good teacher’. In Japanese schools, good teachers seem to be expected to prioritise collective interests over personal interests (see Article II); from a micropolitical standpoint, organisational and social-professional interests trump the self-interests of the teacher (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002). In Article II, there was a clear tension between the beginning teachers working for the students in their ‘private domain’ and the other teachers and the community in the ‘public domain’. Senior teachers’ evaluations of beginning teachers often focussed on the public side – how the beginning teacher performed as a member of the community. On the surface, this is connected to how the role of teachers is defined and what expectations are placed on them, but lurking just below the surface is an important emotional dimension: the feeling of shame for letting down colleagues and making them do extra work. This was voiced strongly by one senior teacher in Article II where (s)he made a reference to one particular beginning teacher who had not taken an influenza shot and failed to finish an important task for being sick. Thus, a good teacher is supposed to put work above anything else.

A good beginning teacher is also seen as being obedient and non-assertive: Even though senior teachers may expect the beginners to take a more assertive stance in their work, for various reasons, beginning teachers can be effectively voiceless within their organisations (see Article II, Correa *et al.* 2015, Uitto *et al.* 2015). Beginning teachers were well aware of this silent norm and even the principal acknowledged that the atmosphere of the school does not allow the beginning teachers to voice their opinions to great extent (see Article II). The expectation for beginning teachers to be obedient and silent is also an emotional rule, as it effectively forces them to suppress their passion and excitement regarding some of their ideas on improvement of both oneself as a teacher and the practices of the school.

In some cases, taking the positions of obedient junior was accompanied by dissatisfaction with having to give up one’s own ideas and wishes (Article I), but more often this act of conforming to the expectations of the environment was simply something required to ensure that the teacher’s professional life progressed

smoothly. Beginning teachers in this study said that refraining from expressing emotions often had to do with maintaining peace and avoiding conflict with colleagues, which is in line with earlier research (Miyajima 2008, Uitto *et al.* 2015). Many times beginning teachers believed that they must go along with the rules, because doing so is part of what it means to be a member of school as an institution (Golby 1996). Some teachers however, mentioned that having to manage one's emotions to match the expectations of the environment was forced *tatemae* that impeded their ability to connect with the students or express themselves to other teachers using their real emotions and voices (*honne*) (see Article I). *Honne* and *tatemae* as well as many of the other cultural double standards and the norms for interaction and appropriate communication can be understood as emotional rules. These emotional rules seem to be connected to the broader narrative of what it is to behave as a functional adult in Japanese society.

The beginning teachers were well aware that opposing their seniors directly or acting against the schools' ethos would lead to a variety of workplace complications. Thus, they were very careful about positioning themselves as a good junior member when dealing with colleagues and the principal (see Articles I, II, and III). Proper positioning of beginning teachers when managing their relationships with their seniors is both complex and important. The results in Article II imply that beginning teachers need to present themselves in a manner that secures support from the people around them. This positioning involved the beginning teacher balancing how independent and capable to seem versus the extent to which they must appear dependent and incapable. Because other teachers are a key resource for professional development, not getting along with colleagues puts a beginning teacher at a serious disadvantage.

## 7 Evaluation of the research

In narrative research it is understood that we cannot access the reality or experience as such, but we can evince a representation of them in the stories (Riessman 2008). That being so, how can we evaluate how well these stories reconstruct the lives of the teachers and the schools? The convincing power of narratives is said to be in their lifelikeness (Bruner 1986). This suggests that when evaluating whether the results are believable in narrative research one should look for how much the stories resemble life instead of asking if the stories are true according to various truth theories (Heikkinen *et al.* 2001). Good and believable stories also carry emotional impact, and Vermeule (2011: 250) has argued that: “stories make sense, not because of their logical connections, but because they activate bits of our affect heuristic”. Heikkinen and his colleagues (2012) suggest that good research is evocative: it evokes aesthetic experiences, feelings and emotions in readers who have similar experiences.

Lifelike and heartfelt accounts of lives lived are the lifeblood of narrative research, but it is important to remember that as such they do not have significance and meaning until they are connected to more general and wider social themes (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). Bullough (2008) argues that when doing research on teachers, focusing on the particular and biographical alone is not enough and it should be combined with the paradigmatic concerned with creating guiding principles and generalisations. Both the biographical and paradigmatic points of view are needed to produce convincing and compelling research; the reader should see both the trees and the forest to get the most out of the research. Following Bullough’s idea that personal problems that emerge in the teachers’ stories should be elevated to the level of social issues, in my research I have connected the teachers’ particular stories to a wider academic discussion of tensions in teachers’ work. I have argued that the tensions and the inability to cope with them have an impact on more than the life of the individual teacher. I have looked for balance between explaining the findings from the stories with Japanese society and culture on one hand and more general theoretical discussion of teachers’ work as relational and micropolitical. Japan and its (teaching) culture are taken into account, but they do not overwhelm the research. There are also plenty of links to existing theories for the international reader to evaluate the transferability of the results. I have utilised research literature produced by Japanese academics in my writing and, though this research is heavily influenced by Anglo-American conventions and theoretical conceptualisations, it does contribute to theoretical discussion of the

concept of tension by grounding it in the Japanese education arena, thus avoiding some of the pitfalls of research conducted on the 'other' in comparative education (Takayama 2011).

In order for the reader to be able to evaluate the trustworthiness of the research, the researcher must provide sufficient means to follow the evidence and logic of the research (Polkinghorne 2007). Moss *et al.* (2009: 505) also suggest that a good research report creates a firm chain of reasoning that combines earlier research with the results from new empirical evidence from the study's conclusions. As this is, to a certain degree built on transparency and the accuracy of the field notes and research report, having someone check the correctness of the translations is important. For that reason, I conducted member checks with the teachers with whom I checked my understanding of the things they told me in the interviews and later on asked for their feedback on my interpretations of their stories used in the manuscripts. I looked for communicative validation through offering this opportunity to comment on the work, but due language issues or just not having enough time to comment, only few of the teachers actually reviewed the article drafts and how their stories were represented. I also confirmed with native research colleagues whether I had understood both the meaning the individual words and phrases and passages, especially in places where I suspected that the narration should not perhaps be taken at a face value. The transparency of the research report is also crucial and is, in the end, judged by whether or not the readers can easily follow the research narrative. I have provided signposts to guide the readers through the research process through references to relevant research literature, extracts from the research material and disclosure of my subjectivity regarding the research process.

Subjectivity of the researcher is an inherent part of narrative research and the researcher's active involvement is an important precondition for a successful inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007). I am fully present in the text, as everything here is a representation of who I am, both as a person and a narrative researcher. Earlier in this thesis I presented my ontological and epistemological pre-assumptions and my connection to the topic. I also outlined the process of producing the research material and analysis in Chapter 4 to meet the principle of reflexivity (Heikkinen *et al.* 2007).

Reflecting back on the path that I have travelled to this point through notes written in the research diary and recalling discussion with different people on the focus of the research, I have come to realise that during the research process there were many tense moments of selection. One constant struggle was between using

the Japanese culture and local conditions as an explanation versus understanding the stories from a more decontextualised and universal point of view. As a non-Japanese scholar I do not have the same kind of “authenticity” in my voice as the “native” (Takayama 2011), but my role as an outsider allowed me to look at the beginning teachers’ work from a more detached perspective. Along with the subjective positioning of the researcher, the relationship with those involved in the research process also constitute an important aspect of transparency. The nature of the researcher–participant relationship is detailed in subchapter 4.3.

Before beginning my doctoral studies, I had imagined the work to be very solitary, but it turned out to be quite the opposite. Adhering to the principle of dialectics (Heikkinen *et al.* 2012) the knowledge of this research is the result of a co-construction process done with the participating teachers, co-researchers and co-writers, all of whom provided important opportunities for dialogue by giving their critical opinions on my readings and providing useful recommendations. I also presented my research frequently in my seminar group in Japan. They commented especially on issues related to Japanese culture and school. Being a member of the EMOT-research project was also an invaluable asset during the research, and the critical, but friendly, feedback from the international senior researchers with whom I had the opportunity to confer during the research process helped me improve the individual articles and this summary a great deal. This type of peer validation enhanced the trustworthiness of the research (Loh 2013). In addition to using different kinds of research material in the form of interviews, field notes and documents, I have also utilised many different ways of reading and analysing the stories to ensure methodological diversity.

The ethical commitment to the research relationship in narrative research is considered to encompass the whole research process and includes considering what the participating teachers get out of being involved in my research. This is also the idea behind the principle of workability (Heikkinen *et al.* 2012). Many of the participating teachers commented that talking about their work in the interview setting and discussing it in a manner that was different their discussions with colleagues was, in itself, meaningful and helped them see their work in a different light. The act of telling was meaningful for the participants (Estola *et al.* 2007). Even though the tensions presented here were not framed by the beginning teachers directly in the interviews, when talking with them about our interpretations, the idea of tensions did resonate.

Lastly, in the name of transparency and reflexivity it is necessary to critically think about the limitations of this research. The empirical material – the stories and

field notes – set limits to how much could be covered and how deeply into phenomena I could delve, because the results must be grounded in empirical evidence. Because the production of the stories is dependent on the nature of the narrative environment, it is not possible for every story to be told, and so it is not possible for the researcher to hear all the stories (Gubrium & Holstein 2008). Working with the stories that were told, I tried to include in my interpretation and argument process the aspects that I judged to be relevant for opening up storied realities of beginning teachers' work.

A more diverse representation of working environments could have benefitted this research. Schools and teachers from rural areas, small schools and really problematic areas are heavily underrepresented in this research, as are private schools with more unique teaching cultures. In addition, a more in depth look into the policies, laws and regulations that govern the work in different areas might have been appropriate to further deepen the understanding of what broader narratives form the backdrop for the tension in the work. Furthermore, although some of the participating teachers spoke about the relationships with parents as a problematic aspect of their work that possibly contributed to the tension, I made the decision to leave them out of my research because 1) I wanted to focus on the relationships within the schools as a micropolitical environment and 2) because previous research detailed the problems that difficult parents pose for teachers (Ishigaki 2012, Kudomi & Satô 2010).



## 8 Discussion and implications

Working as a teacher and being in relationships means having to live with tensions (Clandinin *et al.* 2009), but the tensions are not inherently good or bad. Just like a violin or guitar string must maintain a constant tension to produce a sound, it can be argued tensions are needed to keep teachers from becoming too comfortable in their work. If a teacher is in a situation where there are no tensions, it is likely that (s)he has stopped caring what goes on around him/herself. However, as mentioned earlier, tensions can also represent an unresolved state in which a lot of energy is waiting to be released. Teachers who work in a state of tension may be prevented from reaching their full potential in the work. If not dealt with, the various tensions can lead to stress and can also lead to stress, burnout and early attrition (Beach & Pearson 1998, Pillen *et al.* 2013, Wakimoto & Chôshi 2015). Collegiality and feeling of belonging to a group can help solve some of the tensions and troubles in the teaching workplace, and that was one side of how teachers talked about the value of their senior colleagues in this research as well. However, I have shown here that the same collegial nature is more often than not connected to the creation of tensions for beginning teachers. Other beginning teachers were mentioned most frequently as an invaluable source of peer support both during the work hours and especially after school. This often happens in social gatherings where beginning teachers can reflect their experiences together. This completely different role of other beginning teachers' highlights the role of the senior colleagues as activators of the various tensions.

As mentioned earlier, even though beginning teachers recognise the existence of tensions, they are often oblivious to their origin, and they do not have the means to release these tensions. Increasing beginning teachers' understanding on different mechanisms behind tensions and problems in their work is important. I think that it is extremely important for teachers to be aware of how the role of their environment and their response to its challenges shapes their workplace. This was illustrated well when teachers told me they felt relief that by participating in this research, they realised that their difficulties with some students could be related to unsatisfying collegial relationships or structural issues of the school. Understanding what source of the tensions is, makes a difference in how beginning teachers cope with the tensions. The knowledge can help reduce the stress when they realise that the failures in the classroom and the staffroom are not solely due to their own limitations (Kelchtermans 2005, 2009).

This awareness of why things may go wrong is an especially salient, because earlier research has highlighted that teachers tend to see problems first and foremost as personal. In Beach and Pearson's research (1998) teachers said that the reason for tensions came from outside, but with time they increasingly started to become critical of their own attitudes and practices, and later identified these as sources of tensions. In the Finnish context, Lanas and Hautala (2015) found out that when teaching students dealt with situations that could be attributed to matters in the work environment, almost all of them aimed at dealing with the issue by attempting to improve themselves, failing to consider whether structures, situational factors or assignments might have been the obstacle. This has been observed in Japan as well: Instead of looking for reasons at the school or system level, the Japanese teachers are said to have a tendency to see most problems as internal issues and blame themselves when the source could be, in many cases, others teachers, students or parents (Kudomi 1994). It is also important to understand that when beginning teachers are expected to behave and act in certain manner (or to have passed the entrance examination, for that matter), the expectation is not focussed on them personally, but it is applied mainly to the roles and institutions that the teacher represents (Kolu 2000). Recognising this projective behaviour and learning how to cope with it could be understood as one part of the skills (beginning) teachers need in order to thrive in their social and organisational environments (Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002).

All this does not mean that the teachers do not bear any responsibility and can just blame their problems on the surroundings. Even though the teachers' work in schools worldwide has intensified and the expectations on teachers' performance has increased, teachers need to have perseverance and will to push through even the more difficult tensions they encounter in their work. The way senior teachers in Article II compared current beginning teachers' situation to the beginning stages of their own teaching career suggests that many of the newcomers need to toughen up to handle the morally perplexing situations in which they need to take a stance to learn how to take in criticism and harsh words from seniors to see them as keys for professional improvement rather than personal attacks. One possible opening for future research would be to delve more deeply into the process that has given birth to the reported weakening of not just teachers but junior employees in many fields in Japan, and what could be done to toughen up the future generations of teachers and students alike.

In many ways, the means by which beginning teachers deal with collegial tensions has to do with their values, what they understand good teaching to be and

what is needed for them to execute it. It also has to do with culturally perceptions about the teacher as individual professional or a conforming performer.

Here the cultural story that gets retold in the school is important. Looking at the teachers' work through the stories of beginning teachers in this research and the way teaching is understood to be a collective undertaking, I am inclined to join Hoffman (2013) in his view that, in the end the process of becoming a teacher has more to do with ensuring continuity of the collective – in this case, the profession of teaching – through creating selves that are committed to the worldview and pursuing goals of the collective than it is about the personal learning process of the teacher involved. It seems that the teachers are working in an environment that tries hard to assimilate them in to the whole. In any context teachers cannot escape interacting and being in relationships with their colleagues, which means beginning teachers must build skills and an awareness of potential traps and treasures these relationships can hold. This is true especially in Japan where beginning teachers cannot really avoid positioning themselves toward some of the broader narratives due to the cooperative nature of the work, putting even more pressure for them to come up with ways to mitigate the tensions.

Based on how often the beginning teachers in this research opted to put social professional and organisational interests over their own and the observations of teachers trying their hardest to maintain harmony in their social relationships suggests that the balance between the different professional interests seems to be different for the Japanese beginning teachers than for their European colleagues, for example. The fact that the self-interests of the beginning teachers are overridden by social professional and organisational interest also leads one to question whether current conceptualisation of professional interests and the micropolitical viewpoints are culturally biased, being grounded in Western individualistic thinking and, as such, may not be the optimal tool for the research in the Japanese context. Testing its fit-for-purpose more rigorously could be an interesting topic for future research.

Approaching this issue from a different angle, it can be argued that beginning teachers try to relieve the tensions via conforming and giving in to the cultural interests of the school. The teachers are moulding their teacher selves to fit the prevailing model of the school by making the sacred story of the out-of-classroom places as a part of their own story (Clandinin & Connelly 1995) and thus releasing the tension completely via assimilation. The other option for the beginning teacher would be to keep their own identities separate and adapt to the requirements and expectations of the environment in name only by telling cover stories. These cover

stories could be seen as a solution to the tensions on a temporary and practical basis, but this would not truly resolve the tension between the conflicting stories and different interests. Moreover, in doing so, they would leave the door open for an early exit from teaching if the tensions were not mitigated (Pillen *et al.* 2013).

McCormack and Thomas (2003) have recommended that beginning teachers should move from the survival stage to more a stable stage in their career with as little tension and conflict as possible, but based on the understanding of the role of tensions in beginning teachers' work, I would dare to suggest otherwise in consideration of the findings of this study. Because the tensions represent such a fundamental part of the beginning teachers' work, the process of learning how to teach (Beach & Pearson 1998) and also learning how to teach those who are learning how to teach (Berry 2008), their presence of tensions in the process of learning and social interaction in education should be properly acknowledged. The tensions should also be properly utilised as an opportunity for learning and growth instead of seeing them as only sometimes that disturbs. Chubbuck and her research colleagues (2001) have shown that the teachers need a safe environment that challenges them just the right amount, and here I argue that teachers also need an environment that has tensions that keep them on their toes professionally, but the tensions should be only of such intensity that they can negotiating them with little help from their colleagues.

So what can be done in practical terms? During initial teacher education and in-service training one simple way to raise the teachers' awareness of broader narratives that have the potential to become tense in the workplace would be simply to force the teachers to question their own and other teachers' assumptions about education or any issue that can be contested. This might require the teacher educators to practise pedagogy of discomfort, where students are taken out of their comfort zone to help them challenge dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices (Boler 1999, Zembylas 2015). If teachers avoid tensions by not bringing up issues that should be aired in fear of upsetting collegial relationships or ruining the atmosphere, they harm the entire community around them. If the tendency is to internalise problems and uncritically accept the existing practices and thinking in the school and at the national level, there are serious flaws in both the teaching culture and teacher education. A teaching culture that addresses tensions and conflicts in a constructive manner would provide for open environment for discussion. Because the tensions are always dependent on context and actors, providing suggestions on how to eradicate the tensions is not possible. However, learning how to live with the constant tensions that accompany our existence as

free human beings should start with educating our children to deal with the complexities and uncertainties of this world. But in order to do that the mindset of teachers toward the tensions needs to change. Examining these mindsets and the search for possibilities to change them could perhaps be best achieved through a reflective action study conducted within a teaching community or through a self-study by a practicing teacher acting as a researcher.



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## Original publications

- I Lassila E & Uitto M (2016) The tensions between the ideal and experienced: Teacher-student relationships in stories told by beginning Japanese teachers. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 24(2): 205–219.
- II Lassila E, Uitto M & Estola E (Manuscript) Relationship tensions among beginning and senior teachers.
- III Lassila E, Timonen V, Uitto M & Estola E (In press) Storied emotional distances in the relationships between beginning teachers and school principals. *British Journal of Educational Research*.

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