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TEACHER STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING TEACHER IDENTITY IN THE COLLEAGUE GROUP: FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF IDENTITY WORK

AKIHITO NAKAMURA*

Abstract

This paper examined previous studies with a focus on strategies to maintain teacher identity within the colleague group. Teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity against occupational difficulties that affect fluctuation in identity have become an important theme in teacher research.

In this paper, based on a review of previous research, I have focused on teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity in the colleague group. Previous studies have discussed teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity in the colleague group with a focus on the homogeneity of colleague groups and conformity.

In contrast to such studies, this paper is intended to clarify the subjective aspects of strategies that attempt to maintain teacher identity in ways different from conformity. Pursuing an analysis from the point of view of identity work and using interview data from junior high school teachers, role conflict in the colleague group and strategies for maintaining teaching identity by narratives have been examined.

In this case, two teacher roles, “bonding teacher” and “disciplining teacher,” were observed, and the role conflict of teachers occurred in connection with requests for a different teacher role under the imperatives of the school system. In contrast to this role conflict, teachers attempted to maintain their teacher identity through three forms of identity work, “distancing,” “adjustment,” and “re-definition.”

In contrast to previous studies, the findings of this study indicate the need to pay more attention to teachers’ voluntary aspects, i.e., their abilities to negotiate their teacher identity across teacher roles, instead of teachers’ passive aspects, i.e., simply socializing their occupational roles.

Key words: teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity,
teacher colleague group, identity work

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* Graduate School of Human Sciences, Osaka University, 1-2, Yamadaoka, Suita, Osaka 565-0871, Japan

1. Introduction and Background

In teacher research, the occupational identity of teachers (hereinafter referred to as “teacher identity”) is now drawing attention. Although the range of interests in this research field is diverse, behind this attention is an understanding that the self-awareness of teachers, i.e., the perception of “what kind of teacher I am,” conditions the consciousness and actions of teachers associated with the specifics of the teaching profession, such as teaching methods, occupational development, and responses to changes at school (Beijaard et al., 2004). Moreover, in the theory of the occupational culture of teachers, which defines the occupational culture of teachers as the “occupational culture formed while teachers faced with ‘difficulties associated with the job of teaching’ overcome such difficulties,” teacher identity, which reflects what kind of difficulties teachers are faced with and how they deal with them, is considered an important analytical viewpoint (Yamada & Hasegawa, 2010: 41–43).

In previous studies, various elements have been pointed out as factors causing “fluctuation” in teacher identity, such as cultural aspects like “uncertainty” and “difficulty in skill assessment” associated with the teaching profession (Kudomi, 2008: 19–25), changes in educational policies or social circumstances, changes in the social circumstances in which schools are placed, and structural aspects at the macro-meso-micro level like interactions with colleagues and students (Day et al., 2006). Teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity are considered an occupational challenge when dealing with the “fluctuation” caused by occupational difficulties (Kudomi, 2008; Yamada & Hasegawa, 2010). Teacher strategies to maintain teacher identity, the theme of this paper, are a notion that refers to “maintaining a sense or self-image that I have been able to do my job as a teacher quite well” (Kudomi, 2008: 24). Previous studies have discussed the teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity from the aspect of actual lessons that teachers give to students or the aspect of responses to educational reforms. For example, in the field of teacher strategy research, a survival strategy of teachers who keep their distance from formative teacher roles in class and focus on their own survival so as to deal with students’ rebellious attitudes has been revealed (Inagaki & Hasuo, 1985; Woods, 1990). On the other hand, recent studies have shown how teachers are trying to maintain their own teacher identity while school situations are changing under the impact of neo-liberal educational reforms (Woods & Jeffrey, 2002; Yamada & Hasegawa, 2010).

In this paper, I would like to focus on teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity within a peer group of teachers. Colleagues have been positioned as important others in traditional teacher research, because it is hard to understand from the outside how difficult the teaching profession can be, and thus recognition or approval from colleagues, who are equally insiders, significantly affects the stabilization/fluctuation of teacher identity (Yamada & Hasegawa, 2010: 43). On the other hand, because there are differences within peer groups of teachers in how teachers see the teaching profession or how they should guide students (Woods, 1983: 63–66),

teachers need strategies for stabilizing their teacher identity under the gaze of their colleagues.

Previous studies mainly examined the characteristics of groups of Japanese teachers, revealing the characteristics of the occupational culture of teachers, such as group mentality of the world of teachers in Japan (Imazu, 2000), the closed nature of groups of teachers (Yamazaki, 1994), mutual non-interference, which means colleagues do not interfere with each other beyond necessity (Kudomi, 1988; Kudomi, 2003), and the norm of “giving first priority to conformity with colleagues” (Nagai, 1977). These studies share the image of teachers maintaining their own identity by “conforming” to the group without exposing the differences among colleagues to the collective world of teachers, and have described teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity in the colleague group focusing on the “homogeneity” of peer groups of teachers and “conformity” of individuals. However, these previous studies only discussed the passive aspects of teachers who gradually “adapt to” the group, while overlooking the subjective aspects of teachers in their strategies for maintaining teacher identity. In other words, they have not fully examined the recursive practices of teachers exploring what kind of teacher they should be or their autonomous actions to choose a strategy to be adopted according to the context in which they are placed and under the circumstances where they pursue their ideal teacher image but must also meet the demands or expectations of their organization or their colleagues.

Even though compliance with the occupational group is indeed a process of occupational socialization, teachers do not just “conform” to their colleagues when conflicts arise within the group over how they see the teaching profession or how they should guide students. Woods describes how British teachers seek to maintain their ideal teacher identity strategically in the space between the roles demanded by the school organization and their ideal teacher image (Woods, 1990: 121–144). These studies suggest various strategies of teachers not only to “conform” to their peer group, but also to maintain and restructure their teacher identity. This paper therefore focuses on the subjective aspects of teachers and reveals various elements of strategies for maintaining teacher identity within a peer group of teachers.

In this paper, I would like to focus on the conflicts within a peer group of teachers in order to address the above research tasks. It is necessary to understand the structural factors causing “fluctuations” in teacher identity when describing teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity. However, in this paper, I will describe the teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity as a way to deal with these conflicts while focusing on the conflicts in the teachers’ peer group.

In Section 2, I will present “identity work” as a concept for understanding the teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity, and then provide an overview of the data used in this paper in Section 3. After determining the conflicts that exist in a peer group of teachers in a case example used in this study in Section 4, I will discuss teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity from the perspective of identity work in Section 5.

2. Analytical perspective

This paper reveals teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity using Snow and Anderson's "identity work" (Snow & Anderson, 1987) as an analytical perspective¹⁾. Snow and Anderson took an interest in how homeless people, who are positioned in the bottom layer of society, maintained self-esteem or self-respect, and focused on practices of people for maintaining their identity, i.e., identity work.

Identity work refers to a "range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1348). The key elements of their analysis are the next two points.

First, they saw identity as something that people construct through practices, and thus paid attention to their talks among various practices. Identity work includes physical expressions, such as how people dress or personal appearance, as well as the selection of a peer group, but they particularly focused on activities to express themselves through talks (identity talk) (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1348). There, the pattern of self-expression, i.e., "how people speak of themselves" when they affirmatively describe their identity, is positioned as identity work.

Second, they see people's identity within the process of negotiation between the social identity and the self-concept²⁾. Social identity refers to "identity socially imputed to individuals in an attempt to place or situate them as social objects" (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1347), but here they particularly focused on the social roles to which people refer (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1366). Imputed social roles and people's ideal identities are not necessarily the same. Therefore, to sustain the identity congruent with themselves, people negotiate to position themselves against social roles. Identity work represents this negotiation process.

The profession of teachers, which is discussed in this paper, comes with an occupational challenge; a gap between the ideal "self as a teacher" and the teacher roles required can be easily developed. For this study, themed around the conflicts within peer groups of teachers and teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity among such conflicts, the notion of identity work is believed to be an effective perspective for analysis.

In this study, therefore, identity work is positioned as one of the teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity through talks and as a practice for stabilizing teacher identity. In the course of this analysis, I will describe the teacher roles that arise within a peer group of teachers and their conflicts, examine the negotiation process between the self and the teacher roles with a focus on how "teachers talk about themselves while referring to their teacher roles," and reveal teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity within the peer group of teachers. In

¹⁾ The analytical perspective was inspired by Woods and Jeffrey (2002).

²⁾ According to the definition by Snow and Anderson, "self-concept" means "one's overarching view or image of her or himself as a physical, social, spiritual and moral being" (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1348) and personal identities refer "the meanings attributed to the self by the actor" (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1347).

this paper, teacher roles are understood as cultural and variable roles formed through interaction, rather than formative and fixed roles, and therefore I will describe teacher roles imputed to individuals within the local context at the school-level, not teacher roles at the institutional level.

3. Overview of the data: Survey target, collection method, and analysis method

This paper uses the interview data of 13 teachers who work at a public junior high school X of Osaka Prefecture. The paper aims to describe conflicts within a peer group of teachers and teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity. The reason for choosing junior high X is as follows:

X junior high School is a mid-sized school with about 400 students and 28 teachers. Its school district includes Dowa Region (*buraku*, discriminated community). It has traditionally put efforts into human-rights education since the 1970s. I will describe the details in the next section, but against such a historical background, teachers at X junior high School have been demanded to fulfill the specific role of giving special consideration to students with an unstable home environment. On the other hand, at the time of the survey, the school was in a situation where this traditional teacher role was being questioned because of the rise of a new teacher role due to changes in the school situation.

Thus, X junior high School was in a situation where role conflict was observed in teachers between the traditional teacher role and an emerging teacher role. Therefore, I concluded that the school was a case example appropriate for observing teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity within a peer group of teachers. Additionally, to dynamically understand the relationship between the situations of the peer group and the self-consciousness of individual teachers, the teachers of the same school were chosen as the subjects of this study.

The subjects are about half of the teachers who work at X junior high School (28 total) (Table 1). Upon selection of the subjects, I tried not to be biased in terms of gender, years of teaching experience, or the school subject they teach. In terms of the years of teaching experience, the age composition of the teachers at X junior high School is polarized between novice teachers and experienced teachers (years of teaching experience: 1–2: 10%, 3–10: 36%, 11–20: 4%, 21–30: 32%, and 31 or longer: 18%), which is reflected in the selection.

Data were obtained from the interview survey conducted during fieldwork. The survey was carried out from September 2009 to October 2012. The surveyor carried out fieldwork about once a week as a school supporter and requested interviews with the subjects during the fieldwork. During the interviews, I asked about the situations of X junior high School, such as students, parents, and characteristics of the teachers, and then had the subjects speak of their life stories. All the interviews were carried out in a private room for about one to two hours. For the most part, one interview was conducted per person, but when I needed to confirm the content or had additional questions, additional interviews were conducted to improve the “validity” of the

TABLE 1. Interviewees' information

Name	Gender	Age	Years of teaching experience	Teaching subject	Years working at X school	Teacher role of oriented	Type of identity work
Teacher A	Male	30s	3~10	Japanese	3	disciplining	—
Teacher B	Female	20s	3~10	Science	6	“Bonding”	re-definition
Teacher C	Male	30s	3~10	Japanese	4	disciplining	—
Teacher D	Male	30s	3~10	English	2	“Bonding”	adjustment
Teacher E	Male	30s	11~20	Japanese	8	“Bonding”	adjustment
Teacher F	Male	40s	21~30	Mathematics	6	disciplining	—
Teacher G	Male	50s	21~30	Science	8	“Bonding”	adjustment
Teacher H	Female	50s	21~30	Japanese	14	“Bonding”	distancing
Teacher I	Male	50s	21~30	Mathematics	23	“Bonding”	distancing
Teacher J	Male	50s	21~30	Mathematics	10	“Bonding”	adjustment
Teacher K	Male	50s	31~	Social studies	14	“Bonding”	distancing
Teacher L	Female	50s	31~	Social studies	12	“Bonding”	re-definition
Teacher M	Female	50s	31~	Art	24	“Bonding”	distancing

Note: “Teacher role” is described in detail in Section 4, and “Identity work” in Section 5.

data (Flick translated version, 2011: 470).

During analysis of the data, I also referred to other data obtained from fieldwork (field notes, school materials), and performed analyses mainly on talks about their “current self” among the interview data obtained from the subjects. I then extracted the teacher role at X junior high School and classified the forms of self-expression in their talks into patterns³⁾.

In terms of the transcribed data, parts that are semantically ambiguous are modified to the extent that the content remains intact. Additions by the surveyor are noted with “(),” omitted text is indicated with “(...),” and talk by the surveyor is indicated with “[],” while silence is noted with “...”.

4. Teacher roles at X junior high School and role conflict

In this Section, I will extract the characteristics of the teacher roles at X junior high School through descriptions of the school situations at X junior high School, and then confirm the situations of the peer group of teachers where conflicts are observed over the teacher roles.

³⁾ “The talks about the self” in this paper are “narratives” given to the surveyor under a specific circumstance in the form of interview, but as they are talks about the “self,” they are understood as narratives also directed toward the subjects themselves.

4.1. *The history of X junior high School and the “bonding teacher”*

X junior high School was established in the 1950s and has a long history. It is located in the urban area of Osaka Prefecture, and there are private railroads and large shopping malls nearby. At the time of the survey (back in 2012), the proportion of students receiving study assistance was about 20% of about 400 students, and the proportion of students with single or no parents was about 15%; the school had a certain number of students with an unstable home background who were socially challenged, such as those from Dowa Region or single-parent students (“troubled students”). There are a few students in each grade who frequently show problematic behaviors, such as being late for school, leaving school early, sneaking out during class, or rebellious attitudes toward the teachers.

The traditional teacher role was formed while teachers interacted with such “difficult students” at X junior high School. Since the 1980s, when the number of students increased along with the urban development of the neighboring areas and with population increase, the school has faced intermittent turmoil, which has made the school very famous in the city. At X junior high School, educational practices have been accumulated through such “turmoil” of students, and the teachers speak of the teacher role they have been conscious of through interactions with “troubled students.”

There are several features commonly seen in their talks; first is their view of the teaching profession for trying to include students with an unstable home background in school. Many of them have experienced not being able to establish a teacher-student relationship with “troubled students” through “normal” guidance, resulting in these students leaving school. The existence of students leaving school is linked with their view of the teaching profession, where they see including students with an unstable home background in school as an important mission as a teacher.

Teacher I: *Some students come to school and cause problems. Even if things get very difficult, the teachers don’t “give up on them,” or are ready to “deal with them anytime.” (...) The students who can understand (the rules of the school when explained) are fine, but those who don’t eventually stop coming to school or hold a grudge against teachers, and it will be difficult to have a personal relationship.*

Secondly, they talk about the view of “bonding” guidance, where they emphasize trusting relationships with student in order to include “difficult students” on the basis of the above view of the teaching profession. There, they seek for student guidance where they value personal relationships formed inside and outside the school, rather than teachers’ institutional authority, to form teacher-student relationships. For example, building a trusting relationship where they “can talk to” students who show problematic behaviors is interpreted as maintaining a relationship with students, as described below.

Teacher E: *When there is a kid who is troubled and we need to understand that kid, being able to bond with the kid or being able to talk to the kid is sort of like the “final fort.” Without this, the kid just snaps totally. This is the most important thing.*

Limitless guidance toward such students is also recognized as an element that creates a “bond,” such as being involved with those students and their parents by visiting their home repeatedly and understanding their home background, willingness to give guidance even outside the school, and taking time to guide such students.

Thus, at X junior high School, the teacher role for including students with an unstable home background into school by “bonding” with them through a trusting relationship is observed. Here, I would like to call this teacher role at X junior high School the “bonding teacher.” Many of the key teachers at X junior high School taught at X junior high School when the school was at the peak of its period of “turmoil” and thus tend to seek to be “bonding teachers.” In this sense, a “bonding teacher” is believed to be the traditional role of the teachers at X junior high School.

4.2. Changes at X junior high School and the “disciplining teacher”

However, a new teacher role has emerged at X junior high School as there have been changes in the school situations, and thus the traditional role of teachers is now being called into question. Let us now examine the new role of teachers and what factors lie behind the shift of the teacher role. In the new teacher role, as seen in the next statement, teachers exhibit a view of the teaching profession where they put more emphasis on the acquirement of “sociality” by all students than on special considerations for certain students.

Teacher F: *(When I first came here, I saw how students were restless at a morning meeting in the hole.) I really didn’t like it, so I said to myself, “I want to straighten them out.” I have been saying that for the first three years quite often. Teacher O also didn’t like the fact that the students at X junior high School “couldn’t do things right,” and said, “Be a person who does things properly in real society.”*

Here, “straighten them out” means making students follow the basic rules of the school, such as how to wear their school uniforms, their attitude in class, and lining up at meetings, emphasizing in the new teacher role that if students follow the rules of the school and act within groups, then they can acquire sociality. They value the rigidity of guidance when controlling the student group and espouse a view of guidance that emphasizes teachers’ institutional authority, including occasional “scolding” and “never being taken lightly.”

Teacher C: *There are times when we need to stay close to students. Some students just ignore our guidance, so we need to listen to what they have to say. But students act as a group, so*

that's something we need to value. There are students who are doing great by following the rules instead of the family background. (...) Sometimes we need to scold (students) properly. In this sense, (the traditional way of guidance is) fuzzy, or too easy, which is kind of frustrating.

Thus, in the new teacher role, the idea of having all the students acquire sociality or forming school order through group control is emphasized. Here, I would like to call this teacher role the “disciplining teacher.”

Today, at X junior high School, “disciplining teachers” are gaining power, but behind this are the following school situations. First, there are changes in students. At X junior high School, troubles among students and falling asleep during class are seen on a day-to-day basis, but the “turmoil” that used to be seen every day is not observed at school in general. While some students with a harsh home background live in welfare housing, others live in a relatively wealthy residential area, and students “are calmer than before in general. Therefore, it is becoming harder to see what kind of problems students have” (school principal). These changes in students are creating a situation where it is difficult for “bonding teachers” to have centripetal power as they used to when forming a teacher-student relationship.

On the other hand, the teacher group has changed; a significant number of teachers at X junior high School were replaced over the past few years. In 2010, 1/4 of the teachers were transferred out, including those who had supported the school culture at X junior high School. On the one hand, many teachers who were transferred to X junior high School “left” the school because of the difficulty in guiding students when the school was at the peak of its “turmoil,” but today no such situation is observed due to changes in the quality of students. It is easier to see the effect of education if teachers choose to become a “disciplining teacher” to cultivate students’ sociality. The “disciplining teacher,” which is “common” for teachers who follow their own experience at other schools, is gaining more power within the teacher group. Among such changes in school situations, the centripetal force of “bonding teachers” is decreasing, while “disciplining teachers” are gaining power. The next statement of Teacher E, who has worked at X junior high School for years, shows this situation of the school.

Teacher E: *“We must guide students by giving priority to building a trusting relationship with students.” I understand this, and I agree with this idea more or less. But now, at X junior high School (...), we can control (the students) without sticking to this. (...) Students are changing, so even if we say, “this is important,” I am not sure whether the (new) teachers can understand it or not.*

4.3. Role conflict within the teacher group

As described above, there are two teacher roles at X junior high School, “bonding teacher” and “disciplining teacher.” In addition to these teacher roles, the teachers spoke of the role of

teachers related to subject teaching (tendency to emphasize subject teaching) and the role of teachers associated with peer relationships (collaboration/individualism) during the interviews. However, the above two teacher roles related to student guidance were observed most frequently.

Behind this is the influence of the school culture as a school with educational difficulties, where problems associated with student guidance have occurred frequently. At X junior high School, teachers have repeatedly discussed how they should guide “troubled” students and a significant meaning has been attached to the style of student guidance. Therefore, the teacher identity of the teachers at X junior high School is strongly linked with the teacher roles associated with student guidance, and thus teachers experience a conflict between these two teacher roles. Now, in what kind of situation do these two teacher roles compete with each other and the role conflict becomes evident in teachers?

As Becker points out, the authority of teachers is fragile and exposing confrontations or problems within the teacher group can significantly hurt the authority of teachers over students or their parents (Becker, 1953: 139). The teachers at X junior high School are aware of this fragility of the authority of teachers because the school has gone through the days of “turmoil.” Therefore, it has become a norm for teachers to guide students in collaboration with other teachers so as to provide students with consistent guidance (“consistency in guidance”). For example, in the document “Teachers’ Confirmations and Understandings” regarding guidance, sharing information about students is emphasized so that there will be no inconsistency among the teachers in their guidance to students who show problematic behaviors. The actual styles of student guidance are formed within the peer relationship on the axis of <bonding-disciplining>.

Under the theory of “consistency in guidance” regarding student guidance, as described above, a teacher role different from teachers’ ideal image is sometimes required of teachers, which causes a conflict between the teacher role they see as ideal and the teacher role demanded within the teacher group. Teacher J is one such teacher who feels conflicted between these teacher roles.

Teacher J: *Each of the (teachers’) opinions must be respected, but we must work as a team, which is difficult. There are certain things we must do, even if I think those are wrong. This is very difficult. There are variations (in opinions) within the colleagues, or even within the grade member. (But) for students, we are all teachers. If we say different things, they will think “why.” So it is quite difficult to decide which direction we should go with. When we scold students, there are ways to scold them. The nuances are different, and the “extent we go” with each of the students also varies. We must be consistent, but it is difficult to determine “how consistent we should be.”*

As Teacher J describes, there are variations in teacher roles that the teachers pursue, but “consistency in guidance” among teachers is required to maintain the authority of the teachers in general when they interact with students. This leads to a situation where teachers pursue their

ideal teacher role when they need to assume the teacher role demanded by circumstances. This situation causes a gap between their ideal teacher role and their self-concept in reality, which results in mental stress or reduced commitment to the profession of teaching (Woods & Jeffrey, 2002).

As described above, role conflict in teachers at X junior high School refers to variations in teacher roles and a state where they are required to fulfill a teacher role different from their ideal within the teacher group under the educational theory of “consistency in guidance,” which leads to a gap between the ideal teacher role and self-concept. Role conflict was more evident in teachers who seek to be the traditional “bonding teacher” (Teachers B, D, E, G, H, I, J, K, L, and M), as their role has been questioned due to changes in school situations. For example, Teacher G describes the differences among the teachers as follows:

Teacher G: *(Differences in teaching among teachers are seen in) ways of student guidance, I guess. If we leave “students who don’t adapt to school” alone, it is easy to do things, because the school itself is calm. It will be hard to deal with them within the school, but whether you do it or not, that’s the difference. Teachers can be divided into these two total opposites. If we impose tough guidance, some students won’t adapt to school. Some students cannot dress properly, or behave badly and break promises. Teachers in some grades group are very strict with how they guide students, while we are like, “Let’s go easy on them, and watch over a little more time.” Thus, there is a difference. And some teachers start to say, “You are too soft, be strict with students.”*

Of course, efforts to enhance the sense of collegiality among teachers are carried out mainly by the head teachers (for example, day-to-day conscious conversations among peers, opinion exchange at school training sessions, drinking parties with certain purposes, etc.). However, role conflict is a problem that has to happen at the conscious level of each teacher during the process of coordinating opinions within the teacher group. Teachers who seek the traditional teacher role have been required to deal with the gap between their ideal “bonding teacher” and the self while meeting the demand to be a “disciplining teacher” in order to maintain their teacher identity. In the next section, I would like to focus on them and look into identity work.

5. Identity work of teachers at X junior high School

In this section, I cast light on the teachers’ talks about themselves and examine various forms of identity work. In doing so, I focus on how they position themselves against the two teacher roles, i.e., the patterns of their talks about themselves. As a result of this examination, three forms of identity work, “distancing,” “adjustment,” and “re-definition,” were observed.

5.1. “Distancing”

“Distancing is a form of identity work, i.e. an attempt to keep some distance between imputed social identity and the self” (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1348). By keeping distance from the imputed teacher role, teachers attempt to maintain their ideal teacher identity. During the talks, the relationship between “bonding teachers” and “disciplining teachers” was positioned contrastingly and the legitimacy of “bonding teachers” was expressed.

Teacher H is a typical example who maintained her teacher identity through “distancing.” Teacher H, who is a female teacher in her 50s, was assigned to the school right after she became a teacher in the 1980s. The school was in a state of “turmoil” and students were controlled through “power.” Teacher H says, “It was a culture shock,” reflecting upon herself back then as follows:

Teacher H: (1) (Back then,) I was very “violent” with students. I used to hit the students who didn’t listen to me with the attendance book until the book was dented. That kind of thing was normal back then. (2) I used to say with other teachers, “If we don’t hit them, they won’t listen to you.” (...) (3) (Back then, I was) a nasty teacher. But the students didn’t listen to me, and Class management was horrible. (4) I am so ashamed of how I started out. That made me who I am now.

The extreme control education described by Teacher H is not necessarily the same as the “disciplining teachers” at today’s X junior high School, but as evident in (1) and (2), Teacher H back then could be called a “disciplining teacher” in the way that she attempted to control the student group using the institutional authority of teachers. On the other hand, (3) and (4) show her regret for her past as a “disciplining teacher.”

After that, she was unable to build relationships with students or parents at the first school she was assigned to, and “began to feel suffocated,” hitting a dead end in being a “disciplining teacher.” After being transferred to another school, she began to think gradually of “bonding teacher” as her ideal teacher role. Today, at X junior high School, she positions herself as a “bonding teacher” while still being conscious of “disciplining teacher.”

Teacher H: [What kind of impression did you have when you were transferred to X junior high School?] (5) I was taught how we should have faith in the students and wait. (6) So, some teachers who don’t know anything about X junior high School might see our school from outside and think, “What kind of school is that? I can’t stand it,” or “Push harder.” (7) But when we have to have faith in students and wait, we should wait a little. By doing so, I was able to build relationships with them even though it took time sometimes. (8) So, I think this is important no matter what anyone says....

In (5), she talks about how she felt the need for “guidance of waiting” for students through experience at X junior high School and describes the “bonding teacher” here. In (6), she describes other teachers as “disciplining teachers,” but expresses herself as trying to keep distance from the “disciplining teachers,” as shown by the phrase, “this is important no matter what anyone says” (8). We can see in (7) that she has been able to practice “distancing” thanks to the experience at junior high where she was able to form relationships with students as a “bonding teacher.” During her talks, she expresses a consistency between “bonding teacher” and herself, which suggests that she has maintained her ideal teacher identity.

As described above, Teacher H deals with the demand to be a “disciplining teacher” through “distancing” and maintains her ideal teacher identity as a “bonding teacher.” The practice of “distancing” was also observed in the cases of other teachers (Teachers I, K, and M). What is common among them is that they all have worked at X junior high School for many years and experienced the “turmoil” at its peak. Of course, they are also conscious of “consistency in guidance” and carry out day-to-day guidance by “being attentive” to other peer teachers, but they all talked about their experience of having formed relationships with “troubled” students as a bonding teacher as well as their pride in having supported X junior high School through such guidance. It is thus considered that the commitment to the school culture of X junior high School gives legitimacy to the traditional “bonding teachers,” making it possible for them to carry out “distancing” as a form of identity work.

5.2. “Adjustment”

“Adjustment” is a form of identity work, which represents a fluid teacher identity, i.e., choosing an appropriate teacher role according to the situations of the teacher group. Unlike “distancing,” teachers deal with conflicts in teacher roles by choosing a teacher role according to the situation instead of keeping distance from “disciplining teachers.” They speak of the relationship between “bonding teachers” and “disciplining teachers” as a relative one.

Teacher D is one of the teachers who described his affirmative teacher identity through “adjustment.” Teacher D, who is a male teacher in his 30s, was influenced by a colleague of his who had long experience as a teacher at the school he was assigned to before coming to X junior high School, and is aware of the importance of “bonding teachers.” Based on his experience of engaging with newcomer students and “difficult students,” Teacher D talks about his view of guidance as follows:

Teacher D: (1) *In the school, students think like, “this teacher is saying so, and we should probably listen and obey.”* (2) *(Whether they think) “we should probably do what the teachers are saying because teachers have authority,” or* (3) *“this teacher is always good to me, so I am the bad one here.” How they feel is very important.* (4) *So some teachers and me pay careful attention to the students and go to places outside school (like students’ homes) in*

order to care the students, because it will be “easier” to get the relationship and trust later on if we care them a lot like that.

We can see “disciplining teacher” from “we should probably do what the teachers are saying because teachers have authority” (2) as the institutional authority is emphasized, while we can see “bonding teacher” from “good to me” (3) and “go to places outside school” (4) as the limitlessness is emphasized. As is evident from statement (4), Teacher D seems to be positioning himself as a “bonding teacher.”

However, we cannot observe a consistency between “bonding teacher” and the self, as was seen with teachers practicing “distancing.” This is because the relativistic attitude toward different views of guidance is expressed in (6) and (7); we can see that “bonding teacher” is not necessarily positioned as a superior existence to “disciplining teacher.”

Teacher D: (5) *As a direction I am going to pursue from now on, I would like to be that (the type of teacher who can go over to students’ home and guide them). (6) But teachers have different ideas about whether this is wrong or not. (7) Some teachers think engaging with students like we do at X junior high School is a good thing, while other teachers think it’s better to do it differently.*

And Teacher D also says, “there are teachers who employ an approach that they think is right, and that’s something we should accept in a sense,” referring to the relative aspect of guidance within peer relationships, and talks about how he “began to feel stumped more often” about these differences in the views of guidance. Teacher D’s talks show his conflict, vacillating between the two teacher roles as he is unable to manage to “distance” himself from “disciplining teachers.”

While Teacher D talks about such conflict, he attempts to describe his affirmative teacher identity by aggressively giving significance to changing his teacher role according to the situations of students or with the teacher group, as seen in the next statement.

Teacher D: (8) *Student guidance is teamwork among colleagues in a sense. (9) If there are gentle female teachers around me, then I will go do it “authoritatively,” and the other teachers provide support. (10) If there are teachers more “authoritative” than me in the school, then my positioning must change in the team of colleagues., I think. (11) Otherwise, it would be negative effect on the students and be tougher.*

Collectivism in guidance is mentioned in (8), while he expresses his standpoint of choosing an appropriate teacher role according to the situations of the teacher group in (9) and (10). Here, he does not adhere to being a “bonding teacher,” but describes a fluid teacher identity that allows him to choose between the two teacher roles so that he can also act as a “disciplining teacher.”

While having such conflict as described above, he sees his now being able to have this kind of viewpoint as “having expanded his horizons as a teacher,” in an attempt to describe his affirmative teacher identity through “adjustment.”

As described above, Teacher D deals with role conflict arising from the relative nature of teacher roles through “adjustment” and describes his fluid teacher identity. With respect to other teachers (Teachers E, G, and J), some teachers switched their teacher role between “disciplining teacher” and “bonding teacher” like Teacher D, while others “fused” the two teacher roles. Such “adjustment” was employed by teachers who are in a position to keep the teacher group together, especially those who emphasize “guidance as a team.” They are strongly conscious of “consistency in guidance,” which means maintaining coherence and consistency in guiding students while securing agreement on guidance within the teacher group. It is thus believed that the identity work of “adjustment” was underpinned by the educational theories of “guidance as a team” and “consistency in guidance.”

5.3. “Re-definition”

“Re-definition” is the form of identity work that allows teachers to create a teacher identity congruent with themselves by giving a new meaning to the teacher roles. Unlike “distancing” and “adjustment,” “disciplining teacher” has superiority in the relationship between the two teacher roles in “re-definition,” and thus “bonding teacher” is positioned as an inferior role.

Teacher L, who is a female teacher in her 50s, has also worked as a teacher while confronting the “turmoil” of the school. She empathized with the idea of “never pulling students too hard” and “bonding guidance,” and has stayed at X junior high School for years. On the other hand, Teacher L is conscious of the issue of the “masculinity” and “femininity” of teachers at the junior high, saying that she often feels students are “taking her lightly because she is a woman” in her day-to-day guidance.

Teacher L: (1) *When I see students who don't listen to what I have to say listening to the teacher who practices a male type of guidance in an “authoritative” or “scarily” style, I am like, “darn it.”* (2) *If I can't compete there, then I must compete differently. I have to spare time doing it.* (3) *But I also feel it's great to have a “silver bullet” like male teachers. (...)* (4) *I think that kind of (male-type) guidance is good when you can do it, but I can't be ...*

Because the authority of “not being taken lightly” is seen in “an “authoritative” or “scarily” style” (1), this can be called the “disciplining teacher,” while limitlessness in guidance is seen in “taking things one step at a time” (2), which can thus be called “bonding teacher.” Teacher L sees “disciplining teacher” and “bonding teacher” within the masculinity-femininity relationship of teachers and is conscious of the superiority of the male-type “disciplining teacher” in relationships with students. As seen in (3) and (4), she doesn't necessarily push away “disciplining

teachers.” As shown in (2), she only uses a passive expression when positioning herself against “disciplining teachers.” Therefore, we cannot see “distancing” or “adjustment” here.

On the other hand, Teacher L also says about her own guidance, “I don’t think I am confident,” or “I receive little recognition from my peers.” From these talks, the two teacher roles are competitive with each other for Teacher L. We can see that her affirmative teacher identity fluctuates, as the teacher role she is positioned with holds an inferior position.

While experiencing such a conflict, Teacher L is trying to revise the “inferiority” of female-type “bonding teacher” by giving it a new meaning as a way to handle it and create a new teacher identity congruent with herself. Teacher L mentions a peer female teacher who supported the “troubled” school as an experience that became a “turning point” for her life as a teacher. For Teacher L, who used to feel that only “big and tough” male teachers were needed at junior high schools, seeing a female teacher working more tenaciously than the male teachers was an experience that made her realize the importance of female roles at junior high schools.

Teacher L: (5) *I realized it was important for this type of teacher to work harder, which affected me a lot. (...) It’s not good to have just tough “brothers” at school. Schools that also have “sisters,” “mothers,” and “fathers” have more “diversity” and ultimately have a “energy” of school*

In (5), she describes the existence of a female teacher having “inferiority” via family roles, such as “sisters” and “mothers,” using figurative phrases in an attempt to affirmatively revise it as an element that leads to widening the “horizons of the school.” In the next statement, she clearly specifies her view of guidance as a “bonding teacher” (6) and describes the affirmative self-concept (7).

Teacher L: (6) *For example, when a parent comes and says he or she needs to talk to the teacher, I think it takes at least two hours. I always have a margin like that in such a situation. Spending that much time isn’t painful at all, and it’s not like we must talk. If the parent is in trouble, then let’s see what he or she has to say. (7) It’s not that I must do it, but rather I want to do it.*

As seen above, “bonding teacher” she pursues was placed in an inferior position by the existence of “disciplining teachers,” which caused fluctuation in Teacher L’s teacher identity. However, she gave a family-like meaning to “bonding teacher,” i.e., she dealt with it through “re-definition” in an attempt to create a teacher identity congruent with herself.

Although there are only a handful of cases displaying “re-definition” (Teachers L and B), what is common among them is that they are both female teachers and did not actively speak of their “confidence as a teacher” or “recognition from peers.” Compared to teachers who engage in

“distancing” and “adjustment,” female teachers practicing “re-definition” do not clearly specify the consciousness that they are supporting or playing a central role in the school culture of X junior high School. Instead, they see themselves as “female teachers” and thus had a hard time choosing to be a “male-type” “disciplining teacher.” They were trying to maintain their teacher identity by bringing in different narrative resources like “family roles” and attempting to practice “re-definition” under a situation where the teacher role they positioned themselves with was restricted, as described above.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have revealed the role conflicts observed within the teacher group and teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity through talks from the perspective of identity work using the example of X junior high School. The findings of this paper can be summarized as follows:

First, the “bonding teacher” role seeking inclusion of students with an unstable home background and the “disciplining teacher” role seeking acquirement of sociality by all students were both observed at X junior high School. Role conflict within the teacher group occurred under the guidance philosophy of “consistency in guidance” when teachers were demanded to assume a teacher role different from their ideal (Section 4).

Second, focusing on the identity work of teachers seeking to be a “bonding teacher” who were being asked about their teacher role revealed that they were trying to maintain their teacher identity through three practices, “distancing,” “adjustment,” and “re-definition,” when faced with role conflicts as described above. The teachers attempted to maintain a teacher identity congruent with themselves by keeping distance from the teacher role imposed on them, choosing a more appropriate teacher role according to the situation of the teacher group, or giving a new meaning to the teacher roles under the situations in which they were placed (Section 5).

Previous studies commonly described teachers who were trying to maintain their teacher identity by “conforming” to the homogeneous teacher group (Nagai, 1977; Kudomi, 2003), and explained that teachers were passive and had to “conform” to the demands or expectations of their peers.

However, what was found in this study was teachers who were trying to maintain their teacher role, vacillating between their ideal and the expectations of peers, while recognizing their expected roles within the group and respecting them. Teachers were active agents who negotiated their own teacher identity between their ideal teacher role and the teacher role demanded of them, rather than teachers who simply “conform” to their peers. In contrast to previous studies of teacher cultures, these findings suggest the need to focus on the aspects of teachers as active agents, such as negotiating their own teacher identity by referring to an ideal teacher role, rather than passive subjects of simple socialization to the teacher role. That is why it is necessary to

analyze the conflicted feelings and strategies of individual teachers within a peer group of teachers in addition to understanding the cultural characteristics of teacher groups, as shown in previous studies.

However, this paper has only described one aspect of teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity within a peer group of teachers. In relation to the two teacher roles observed, the findings of this paper can be interpreted as follows: First, in terms of the “disciplining teacher, junior high schools in Japan emphasize organizational norms, unlike the students centralism atmosphere of elementary schools, and pursue an extremely formal style of guidance focused on rules (LeTendre, 1994: 58). In this sense, “disciplining teacher” can be interpreted as a teacher role that strongly reflects the characteristics of this school culture in junior high schools. On the other hand, a “culture of guidance” based on the idea that “building trusting relationships with students and their parents is the basis of guidance” is rooted in the world of teachers in Japan (Sakai, 1999: 127), and this is recognized as “bonding guidance” and is represented in a more “refined” form at schools with educational difficulties attended by students from harsh socioeconomic backgrounds (Shimizu, 2002). Therefore, “bonding teacher” can be understood as one of the typical teacher roles seen in schools with educational difficulties in Japan.

Based on the above, the case of X junior high School can be interpreted as representative of conflicts within the teacher group and teacher strategies for maintaining teacher identity that arose within the teacher roles associated with student guidance at a junior high school with educational difficulties. Although the findings of this paper have this limitation, they serve as a viewpoint for understanding how teachers maintain their teacher identity and what kind of strategies they take in doing so when they are placed in a state of conflict, including conflicts between teacher roles associated not only with student guidance, but also with learning guidance or career guidance, and teacher conflicts that arise among various actors, such as within the relationship between teachers and students/parents or the relationship between policy and school.

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