

A Case Study of an In-service Teacher Training Programme

Yamada Harumi

In line with the Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities” promulgated by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), prefectural boards of education throughout Japan launched a five-year plan in 2003 that provides for English teachers to undergo intensive training. This paper will analyse the in-service training programme as it was proposed by MEXT and implemented at local level. Interviews with participants reveal some problems arising from the coercive nature of the programme, from the diverse backgrounds and experience of the participants, and from the difficulty of changing school practice. Recommendations for improvements will be made based on studies of similar initiatives.

Key words : teacher training, teacher education, change

1 . Introduction:

On March 31, 2003, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) promulgated the Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”. In this document, the ministry announced the ‘promotion of intensive training for English teachers in a five-year plan.’ The plan reads as follows:

Intensive training given by the Prefectural boards of education in conjunction with training at the national level will be supported so that all English teachers can undertake training in the five years from 2003 through 2007. This training will aim to improve the teachers’ abilities to cultivate students’ practical communication abilities. The level of attendance of training will become known through the Status Report on the Improvements in English Education mentioned previously. (Published in English, MEXT, 2003)

In line with this plan, prefectural boards of education throughout Japan launched a programme of intensive training for English teachers in 2003. This was a by-product of the Japanese government’s investigation into the prospective educational needs of Japan’s 21st -century generations. A governmental advisory body established in 2000 identified a need for in-service training for all English teachers at local schools throughout Japan (MEXT 2001). In 2002, MEXT announced in-service training for English teachers in a five-year plan (MEXT 2002).

English teachers at local junior and high schools in Fukui Prefecture were instructed in July 2002 to take a ten-day in-service training (INSET) course at some point in the 2003-2007 period, which was later shortened to the 2003-2005 period. In this paper, I will analyse the INSET program

as proposed by MEXT and realized at local level. I will discuss the aims and contents of the course on the basis of the interviews with the participants in the first year of the programme. From studies of similar initiatives, I will also make recommendations for improvements to the local-level implementation of this programme.

2. Framework of INSET:

In this section, I will analyse the framework of the programme and its contents. Questions will be raised about this programme, which will be answered based on the interviews with participants of the programme in Section 3.

2.1 Analyses of the programme:

Paran (2003, pp.6/6-6/12) offers us a framework for assessing this in-service training (INSET). First, let us analyse the course according to his rubrics.

Who is the initiator?

MEXT.

Who is the provider?

The Prefectural Board of Education.

Who is in charge of choosing the content of the programme?

A supervisor in the educational board is responsible for the content of the programme. The supervisor is an English teacher appointed to the educational board who has participated in an INSET course under the MEXT scheme, and is regarded as an experienced expert teacher.

Who are the teachers and how are they selected?

All English teachers at junior and senior high schools, regardless of age, experience and expertise, are required to take the INSET. The instruction to do so was issued at short notice in the first year of this programme. Teachers who have taken the INSET under the MEXT scheme, or those who are retiring in five years are exempted. Fukui Prefecture decided to shorten the five-year plan to three years at the end of the first year of the programme. This meant that 66 English teachers took the course in 2003 and that the number was doubled to 131 in the second year (Year 2004). (The information is based on the participant lists issued by the Prefectural Board of Education) All the remaining teachers are supposed to be taking the course in the third year (Year 2005), but teachers who are unable to do so will have another chance to attend next year.

What are the aims of the programme?

The programme brochure describes the aims of INSET as follows:

In order to educate citizens who can play active roles in international society, schools are expected to thoroughly train the students in practical communication.

Therefore, in order to cultivate the English communication abilities of the junior and senior high school students in Fukui Prefecture, we are conducting this training programme, targeting all English teachers with a view to improving their teaching abilities.

(from the 2003 booklet of Fukui INSET for English teachers. The original is in Japanese, translated by the author.)

In addition, the programme supervisor, in an interview with the author, has stated that there are two aims in this course, and the two aims are the same as the first two of the three aims of the MEXT's 12-Month Overseas Programme, namely:

- (1) to improve the participants' abilities in the basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- (2) to provide the participants with the ability to justify, on theoretical and educational grounds, teaching for 'communicative competence' in English, and for them to recognize the potential in a range of methods and resources beyond the textbook for developing communicative English in their students. (cited from Lamie, 1998)

Is there a qualification at the end?

No qualification is issued, but the course is compulsory for all English teachers.

How is the programme evaluated?

Participants are required to take a TOEFL at the beginning and at the end of the course. A questionnaire is also completed at the end of the course. Participants are required to submit their own 'future study plans' after the course. The educational board and MEXT will monitor the attendance and the TOEFL results of the participants. There is no feedback from participants during the course, but they may write comments on all the sessions at the end of the course.

What is the duration of the programme?

The INSET is a ten-day programme. The training takes place over a two-term period, resulting in a part-time programme that is completed in the course of a year.

How does the programme guarantee continuity?

Participants are asked to submit 'future study plans,' by which they are expected to continue studying on their own initiative.

Table 1 shows the schedule of the Fukui Prefectural INSET programme for 2003. Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 suggest that the concept is one of 'teacher training,' where the course is intended to inculcate "appropriate knowledge and skills, and is content-based." (Batstone and Block, 2003). The programme is apparently designed to give a somewhat bird's eye view of communicative language teaching (CLT) by reviewing methodologies for teaching the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening).

The programmes also feature business people who are invited to speak about the 'English

abilities needed in the international society of the 21st century.’ Sessions 6 and 7 raise the issue of ‘teacher education,’ where teachers are expected to reflect on their experience and exchange ideas, while improving their English by conversing with native-speaker ALTs. It is the author’s view that perhaps taking the TOEFL at the start and finish of the course falls neither under ‘teacher training’ nor ‘teacher education’ by strict definition. This raises the question why the TOEFL is required at all.

Table 1 Schedule of Fukui Prefectural INSET, Year 2003 (from the course booklet, The original is in Japanese, translated by the author.)

	Dates (10:00-12:30, 13:30-16:00)	Contents
1	September 16, 2003	- Opening ceremony, - Lecture “Theory and Practice of the Communicative class” - Taking TOEFL
2	September 17, 2003	- Lecture and workshop on English pronunciation and CLT methodologies
3	October 1, 2003	- Lecture and workshop on improving English teaching skills: Teaching reading and writing
4	October 2, 2003	- Lecture and workshop on improving English teaching skills: Teaching listening and speaking
5	October 24, 2003	- Lecture and workshop on improving English teaching skills: Comprehensive skills
6	November 27, 2003	- Workshop, joining the ALTs’ mid-term training: discussions, speeches, debates, classroom activities, etc.
7	November 28, 2003	- Workshop, joining the ALTs’ mid-term training: discussions, speeches, debates, classroom activities, etc.
8	December 25, 2003	- Lecture and workshop to develop the English abilities that are needed in the international society of 21st C.
9	January 6, 2004	- Business people’s lecture and workshop on the English abilities that are needed in the international of 21st C.:
10	January 7, 2004	- Taking TOEFL - Questionnaire - Closing ceremony

2. 2 Questions raised about the programme:

From the analyses of the framework and the contents of the programme, the following questions arise:

- (1) *The participants are of different ages, experiences, and English abilities. How does this fact affect the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its aims to improve their English abilities and teaching methods?*
- (2) *TOEFL scores may be hard to improve after only ten days of training. It is also hard to evaluate whether the teachers’ teaching methods have improved during the course of the training. How does this fact affect the teachers’ reactions?*
- (3) *Is ‘10 days’ short or long?*
- (4) *How do the teachers react to the instruction to attend the course at such short notice?*
- (5) *How effective is it to have the participants submit ‘future study plans’?*

- (6) *How do the teachers react to the 'teacher training' and the 'teacher education' parts of the course?*
- (7) *How do the teachers change their practices after the course?*

In the next section, we review the results of the interviews with the trainees.

3. Interviews with participants:

This section will address the questions raised in Section 2.2 on the basis of the interviews with the trainees.

3.1 Teachers:

Five participants from the 2003 programme were interviewed by the author in June 2004. The interviews with Teachers A, B, C and E were done over the phone. The interview with Teacher D was done face-to face. The backgrounds of the teachers from the 2003 programme are as follows:

Teacher A is a junior high school teacher. She has taught for several months as a substitute teacher at two junior high schools. This is her third year as a full-time junior high school teacher. She majored in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) at college.

Teacher B is a senior high school teacher. She has taught for two years as a substitute teacher at two senior high schools. She has also taught full-time at a junior high school for two years. As a high school student, she studied for one year in the United States. She majored in socio-linguistics at university.

Teacher C is a senior high school teacher. He has taught at an academic high school for six years. He majored in comparative education at university.

Teacher D is a junior high school teacher. She has taught for one year as a substitute teacher and has taught full-time at three junior high schools for more than 18 years. She majored in TEFL at college and studied for one year as an exchange student at a university in the U.S.

Teacher E is a senior high school teacher. He has taught for five years at a university-exam preparatory school and has taught at academic high schools for over 14 years. He majored in English literature at university.

3.2 Teachers' reactions:

This section summarises the trainees' reactions by answering the questions raised in Section 2.2.

- (1) *The participants are of different ages, experiences, and English abilities. How does this fact affect the programme's effectiveness in achieving its aims of improving their English abilities and teaching methods?*

Teacher B found some lectures were a waste of time, and even 'painful.' Teacher C was dissatisfied with the 'knowledge' given in the lectures, which was already familiar to him. Teacher D said 'so much of the energy was wasted because of the differences in the participants' experiences and language levels.' Teacher E said that only one-fifth of the programme was useful to him, and expressed dissatisfaction that the organizer hadn't taken into account the differences in

participants' English abilities and experience. This failure resulted in inefficiencies, he said.

One positive thing that came up in the interviews was that all interviewees thought it was good, enjoyable, and useful to meet teachers with different backgrounds and to exchange ideas and information.

(2) *TOEFL scores may be hard to improve after only eight days of training. It is also hard to evaluate whether the teachers' teaching methods have improved during the course. How does this fact affect the teachers' reactions?*

Teacher A mentions that there was no point in taking TOEFL at the beginning and the end of the course because the eight days in between were spent on learning CLT methodologies. Teacher B and Teacher D said they felt "psychologically pressured" by the fact that their test results would be known to the educational board. Teacher C stated that there was little correlation between high TOEFL scores and the quality of teaching. All the interviewees were negative about the educational board's handling of the test results.

(3) *Is '10 days' short or long?*

The fact that the course took place over a five-month period between September and January attracted two different responses. Teacher D pointed to the benefit of placing an interval of a few weeks between sessions. She said, 'we came back to the next sessions with stories about how we had put some ideas into practice in our classes, which was very good and encouraging.' Teacher C said that to improve English-speaking abilities the course should have taken place over ten consecutive days, without breaks.

Whether the '10 days' is short or long depends on what the programme aims to achieve. If the aim was to give the participants a chance to think about further study, as the organizers say (see Section 3.2), this was certainly achieved in ten days, given that all the interviewees expressed their intention to continue studying on their own. However, as Teacher A said, it would have been difficult to improve their English materially in just 10 days.

(4) *How do the teachers react to the instruction to attend the course at such short notice?*

All the interviewees found it extremely hard to reschedule 10 days of work at their schools. They either had to teach their classes on alternative dates or cancel them. So scheduling INSET during term time caused difficulties to teachers and students.

(5) *How effective is it to have the participants submit 'future study plans'?*

Teacher B and Teacher D said that it appeared as if they had to make a vow to continue studying. Teacher B was not favourable about the measure, commenting that people would never study if brow-beaten in this way. Teacher E, however, was more positive about submitting his 'future study plans,' in which he expressed a wish to take sabbatical leave for an MA in TESOL. However, his application was later turned down at his school. He was told that the school could not spare him.

(6) *How do the teachers react to the 'teacher training' and the 'teacher education' parts of the course?*

All the interviewees favoured the 'collaborative reflection,' in which they conducted a micro-teaching session of about 10 minutes each and commented on each other's practices, sharing ideas with their peers. Bailey (1996) reports a successful case of a graduate class on methodology for experienced second-language teachers. He finds that "collaborative learning can provide a powerful

mechanism for teachers to explore their own conceptions of teaching and learning” (p.277).

But teachers found some of the lectures on ‘appropriate knowledge and skills’ - hence part of the teacher training content - to be a waste of time. All the interviewees expressed a wish to be given a choice of themes and courses to take. In other words, they wished to be treated as autonomous learners.

(7) How do the teachers change their practices after the course?

Interestingly, the teachers who showed the most positive reactions and changes were teachers with nearly 20 years of teaching experience, Teacher D and Teacher E. They enjoyed taking the course and the exchange of ideas with other participants, and wished to apply what they learned in their teachings. Gorsuch (2001) also presents a data showing “middle-aged teachers represent(ing) a group of potential users of communicative activities in that they may have confidence in their teaching seasoned by experience, yet feel they want further knowledge and variation in their working lives” (p.16/26).

When asked about any changes in their approaches to teaching, Teacher A said, ‘At work, it is still difficult to teach English communicatively, especially when my new students have experience of being taught by a traditional teacher. I accept this fact.’ Teacher C admitted he was still teaching using the ‘yakudoku’ (grammar-translation) approach. Teacher E said that at academic high schools where students are studying for university entrance exams, it was difficult to realize CLT, but that he was thinking of teaching English communicatively if he should teach first-year students next year.

Although Teachers A, B, and C were negative about change, they and all the other interviewees would take more INSETs in the future, if given the opportunity. If a change in attitude was one of the programme's aims, it has achieved a measure of success here.

4. Suggestions for the INSET programme:

From the interviews to the teachers, it can be seen that the following points were causing problems in the programme:

- (1) The coercive nature of the programme was not accepted favourably by the participants.*
- (2) As the participants had diverse backgrounds and experience, their needs were not always met in the programme.*
- (3) There was little change in the teaching practices of participants*

Problem (1), the problem of coercion, may have come from both the political and educational cultures behind this programme. Problems (2) and (3) need to be discussed along with issues arising from in-service training methodologies.

In this section, the author will first discuss the educational and political cultures related to INSET that could be causing problems with the programme and discuss what could be done to remedy these problems. Secondly, we will discuss the INSET methodologies that would help to meet participant's needs more fully and to change their teaching practices for the better.

4. 1 Educational and political issues related to the INSET programme:

Some specific educational and political issues may have caused the problems experienced with INSET. Although “reculturing is hard work and time consuming”(Fullan 2001, cited by Batstone and White 2003, p.8/24), these issues have to be discussed if INSET is to be more effectively implemented.

4. 1. 1 Educational culture:

Some interviewees expressed difficulties in implementing CLT in their own classrooms (see Section 3.1.(7)). Gorsuch (2001) reports a survey conducted on 876 Japanese high school English teachers. The survey suggests “that teachers mildly approve of communicative activities, yet ... there are potent impediments working against teachers actually using such (communicative) activities in their classrooms”(p.16/24). In her survey, she found that “there were powerful impediments working against their acceptance of CLT activities, such as the strong influence of university entrance exams and students’ expectations, and the surprisingly weak influences of pre- and in-service teacher education programmes, and privately undertaken courses”(p.15/24).

As was seen in Teacher E’s case of his application for teacher-development being turned down by the school, the teachers’ working places themselves could hinder innovation. In academic high schools, where they are often evaluated according to university entrance examination results, both school staff and students are more concerned with getting higher marks in the tests. Many teachers still believe that the ‘yakudoku’ method is better for this purpose (see Gorsuch 2001). In Lamie (2004), all the Japanese teachers in her case study voiced concern ‘over the need to conform to the standard procedures and practices of the remaining teachers, but most particularly the presence of an unsupportive principal was highlighted as a potential barrier to change (p.131)’.

Here, the problem lies not in the INSET itself, but rather in the Japanese educational system, which MEXT is trying to reform to accommodate to the needs of the 21st century (MEXT 2003). In the reform, the stakeholders (students, teachers, principals, and parents) need to be convinced, based on empirical studies, that the CLT methodology will yield the desired results, including the entrance examinations.

4. 1. 2 Political cultures:

The instruction to attend the course was perceived by many participants as being peremptory, even coercive in tone. Various interventions from those who were neither teachers nor teacher trainers could also be cited, as seen in the local government’s decision of shortening the project from five years to three years. In its original concept, the programme was to have introduced new thinking about CLT methodology through a series of seminars. There seems to be little understanding here that “the normal stages of innovation diffusion usually require more time and patience”(Stoller, 1997) and that in the effort of “rapid and massive changes,” “nothing other than surface adherence to the language of the innovations can be guaranteed”(Prabhu 1987, cited by Hayes 2000, p.136).

Another big problem in this programme is that the supervisors were thrown on their own resources when planning the course. This implied a lack of human resources for planning. Given the lack of human resources and time, there was insufficient time for a proper needs analysis, and as a result, part of the programme failed to meet the participants' needs. To plan and organize the course satisfactorily, a team should have been set up.

4. 2 Models of change:

Here, we will discuss how far the INSET met or failed to meet participant needs, and also how to bring about the 'change' that MEXT intends to foster through the prefectural INSET programmes.

4. 2. 1 Participants as active shapers of the course:

According to the results of the National Foundation for Educational Research survey of primary and secondary school teachers in the U.K., the main factors underlying good practice in the provision of effective continuing professional development (CPD) are:

- (1) opportunities for sharing ideas
- (2) relevance of content for teachers' needs
- (3) opportunities for 'hands-on' practical experience
- (4) well structured and focused sessions
- (5) good delivery by presenters
- (6) presenters who have recent relevant experience. (Lee, 2002)

The same report also reveals the two main factors inhibiting effective professional development were 'inappropriate or irrelevant content' and 'poorly planned and badly focused courses.'

One idea to pursue the factors above ((1) – (6)) is to take a process-oriented approach. Paran(2003, p.6/16) suggests some process-oriented approaches:

- to structure courses so that the focus is on the teachers producing their own materials, thus having to constantly evaluate what the trainer is providing and adapting and taking up as much of it as they are capable of.
- to ask teachers to produce methodological guidelines for other teachers; look through their folders and choose the most successful and least successful activities (and explain why) or reflect over the course and abstract principles that they have learnt from it.

In the process-oriented approach, as the teachers are active participants and shapers of the course, the content will naturally be relevant to the teachers' contexts. Participants will also be able to share ideas with their peers. The diversity of the teachers' backgrounds could contribute to creating a variety of ideas and discussions.

One reason for the participants' dissatisfaction with the INSET course was that there was no needs analysis. Without a pre-course needs analysis, the programme content had to take a somewhat a bird's eye view of CLT in general by reviewing methodologies for teaching the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening)' (Section 2.1). The programme also had to be constantly evaluated by the participants during the course. The success of the 12-month programme in Birmingham University, which Lamie (1998) reports, may be partly due to their constant

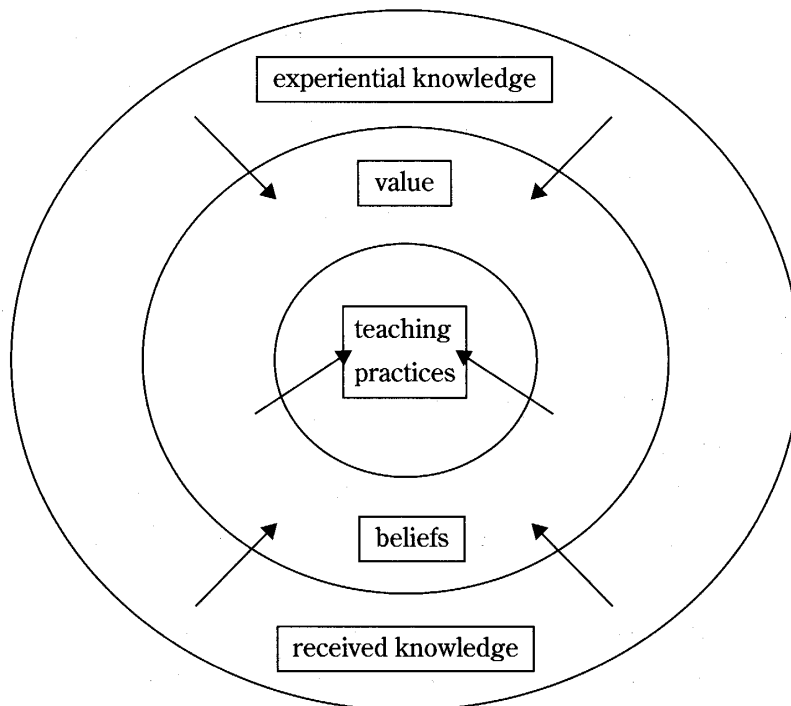
openness to constructive comments about the course from participants. This does require great flexibility and responsiveness on the part of the organizers. Among the characteristics of language programs that stimulate innovation, Stoller (1997) includes “a stable core faculty, who demonstrate creativity, flexibility, initiative, commitment, professionalism, and a willingness to communicate with peers” and “administrative leadership and dynamism, i.e., responsive, flexible, and supportive language program administrators” and “a flexible organizational framework.”

4.2.2 Kontra's training model:

In the interviews with teachers, some respondents stated that their teaching practices had not changed after the course. Kontra's (1997) training model (Figure 1) shows how 'received knowledge' and 'experiential knowledge' influence the values and beliefs of the teachers and how their beliefs and values change the teaching practice. Kontra summarises purpose of methodology training in a few consecutive steps:

- raise awareness of inner values and beliefs and initiate their development
- pass on the craft and initiate its application within the framework of the trainees' inner values and beliefs
- induce in the trainee a never-ending process of thinking, questioning, challenging, and changing (Kontra, 1997, p.248)

Figure 1. Kontra's (1997) training model



In order to change teaching practices, you also need to change beliefs and values. The prefectural INSET starts and ends with taking TOEFL, and most of the lectures are top-down,

which is not calculated to encourage the teachers' development in a way that raises the teachers' awareness of their own values and beliefs. Teachers need to articulate what they believe and value in teaching, and be made aware of these beliefs. When the doors of their inner values and beliefs are open, the new methodologies that are introduced in the INSET can be assimilated into their inner values and beliefs as new experiential and received knowledge. In turn, these changed values and beliefs can transform their teaching practices.

4. 2. 3 Community of Practice:

By having the teachers submit a 'future study plan' at the end of the course, INSET aims to maintain the continuity of the programme. However, this irked some of the participants. On the other hand, all the interviewed teachers stated after the course that they would like to participate in additional INSET programmes in the future. Lamie's (2004) survey of 100 Japanese junior and senior high school teachers in 1998 also "indicate(s) that there is still a great need, and desire, for more training provision (64% of teachers had received no INSET on language teaching methodology)" (p.583).

Freeman (2002) asks, "How (can) schools as socio-cultural environments mediate and transform what and how teachers learn? How can these contexts be orchestrated to support the learning of new teachers and the transformation of experienced practitioners?" (p.12) As Moon and Boullon (1997, p.72) suggest, if we ensure that short courses like this are "integrated within an overall framework for in-service development, with long-term goals and mechanisms to provide systematic follow-up support for teachers," this will systematically give teachers opportunities for reflective practices and allow a better chance for the diffusion of this innovation, in effect creating communities of practice (CoPs).

As in the 'cascade' model, where groups diffuse practice to other groups (cf. Hayes, 1997), CoPs work through 'seed carriers' (in Senge's words) who initiate change (Weber, 1999). Senge points out that "successful changes start small" as "nothing that grows starts large" (Weber, *ibid*). MEXT started the programme as a five-year plan. In effect, every year a group of people become involved in the teacher development programme, go back to school, ideally diffusing there what they have learned, and thus the loop widens year after year. If the MEXT's INSET is programmed in such a way that it creates CoPs of English teachers at each school, it will accelerate the momentum of change, albeit on a small scale at first.

5. Conclusion:

In an urgent effort to develop the English language abilities and the CLT methodology of all English teachers in Japan, MEXT implemented their five-year plan for INSET in 2003. This paper examined the INSET programme at a local level, taking the case of a single prefecture. The programme format and its contents were examined, and the results of interviews conducted with participants were analysed. In these analyses, the following points became apparent:

- (1) The coercive nature of the programme was not viewed favourably by the participants.

- (2) As participants have diverse backgrounds and experience, their needs were not always met by the programme.
- (3) There was less change in the participants' teaching practices than the programme had aimed for.

The author would like to make the following recommendations:

- (1) Some aspects of the educational and political culture need to change.
- (2) Participants should become active shapers of the course.
- (3) As in Kontra's training model, inner values and beliefs have to be influenced.
- (4) Cops need to be created to foment 'change'.

The INSET programme in the subject prefecture ends this year, but INSET itself will continue both at individual and collective levels. If the programme takes the above-mentioned considerations into account, I believe that INSET will succeed in developing teachers who can actively help to educate 'citizens who can play active roles in international society' as the programme initiators intended.

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