

Personal messages of and for others: writing teacher blogs on the Internet

New Cultural Frontiers

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Abstract

How does the idea of the subject engage with school teachers' changing work lives today? In this paper, I consider the construction of the subject together with individuals' personal stories of being a teacher presented in online public space. Introducing 'teacher blogs' in Japan, that is, blogs which are written by self-identified school teachers, this paper examines some individuals' articulations of their working experiences. Existing research on changing teachers in changing schools suggests that individual teachers become increasingly reflexive of themselves in the context of the modernisation of education system. It draws on theories of teachers' agency and autonomy. This paper draws on and elaborates Alain Touraine's ideas of the subject and subjectivation. It first discusses teacher blogs as new figures of a subject who mediates interactions between a teacher's work and an individual's personal experience through creative writings of himself or herself. It then explores an analysis of teachers' work lives which bloggers draw from their stories. The ideas of the subject and subjectivation allow us to better understand dynamically contradicting teachers' work lives which individuals create while adapting changing teaching environments into their everyday practice.

1. Teachers' Agency and Autonomy

Teachers have represented schools. This is well illustrated in a classical sociological portrayal of teachers as 'unbending creatures of routines'(Waller 1932). In sociological accounts of classroom interactions, teachers acted more or less in the same way, simply representing schools that integrate societies, reproduce cultures, or legitimise inequalities(Jackson 1968; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977). In contrast to the sameness of what teachers do in schools, today individual teachers represent themselves in their personal trajectories. For example, on a popular education-related blog portal site in Japan (<http://www.blogmura.com/>), 3543 education-related blogs are now registered, most of which are written by those who self-identify themselves as teachers or educators ¹.

¹ The number of registered blogs was given on the portal site on 31 October, 2009.

“Teacher blogs” are not a phenomenon unique to Japan, but they are also found in countries such as England and U.S.A. where new values, such as competition between schools, seem to be influencing teaching environments for teachers (Wallace 2007). Understanding teachers and what they do today requires some theoretical consideration beyond understanding social organisations and individuals. This paper considers the construction of the subject, as argued by Alain Touraine. It does so with a case of teacher blogs, examining teachers’ experiences of work lives written and presented in online public space by some individuals.

Personal blogs written by self-identified teachers, namely, ‘teacher blogs’, appeared in Japanese online public space from the early 2000s. This was the time when Japan’s new national curriculum was introduced to primary and secondary schools. Around the same time, some teachers’ personal experiences became public concerns in Japanese society, too. While teacher blogs were emerging online, a series of offline books written by school teachers were published and gained some popular attention (Yoshiie 2003; Mizutani 2004). ‘Teacher books’ tell readers teachers’ real life stories, in which individual teachers make great efforts and commitments beyond their work duties in order to reach their students. The books’ stories are consistent with teachers’ new capacity expected by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). According to MEXT, teachers today need to attract students to schools with ‘strong passion’, ‘sound capacity as an expert’ and ‘overall capacity as a person’ (Ministry of Education). While how it is possible for teachers to cope with such multiple capacities has been questioned by academic research in teacher education (Ota 2000), the authors of the teacher books seem to show us how they can adapt to changing teaching environments. Contrary to the offline teacher books, online teacher blogs, which this article explores, offer an alternative view of changing teachers.

To understand the emergence of teachers’ personal stories in online public space in the context of changing school education, two areas of research provide useful theoretical starting points. One is studies of changing teachers in changing schools. The other is Science and technology studies which analyse the relation of science and technology with other actors. Firstly, recent research on changing teachers in changing schools turned to theories of agency and autonomy and institutional theory in order to understand the complexity of transformations surrounding school teachers’ work. Studies on how teachers experience contemporary education reform argued for teachers’ self-identity as a balance and measure of autonomy between work and life (Woods and Carlyle 2002). According to the studies, teachers become increasingly reflexive of themselves in the modernisation of education system (Troman 2000; Woods 2002; Bolivar and Domingo 2006; Jenkins and Conley 2007). Furthermore, researchers who analyse education policies argue that individual teachers’ negotiations of their professional lives is not only individuals’ bottom-up initiatives. Teachers’ self-management is also encouraged in the top-down reform of education system, which is set in the language of performance and in a shift from the organization of schools to the self-monitoring of schools (Ball 2003; Jenkins and Conley 2007). They suggest that policies which emphasize individual teachers’ performance are technologies to reorganize teachers’

work(Ball 2003). Studies of changing teachers in changing schools tend to assume a link a link between teachers' internal processes and external transformations as self-evident. studies of changing teachers in changing schools

Meanwhile, recent research built on and extending institutional theory points to the relevance of why individual teachers' personal negotiations and schools' external changes should be related. The research focuses less on individualistic approaches to understanding teachers in changing schools, but rather draws attention to contexts between changing environments (such as policy changes) on the one hand and teachers' response to them on the other, and to the degrees of correspondence between them (Coburn 2004; Burch 2007). It questions a one-sided idea of teachers' autonomy, that is, 'the occupational norm of autonomy in teachers' work', which suggests that what teachers do is framed in social organization of teachers' work and is separated from top-down policy changes (Coburn 2004). Instead, research drawing on institutional theory argues that individual teachers' interpretations of their environments make a powerful framework for teachers to exercise agency as they mediate external changes into classroom practices through their worldviews (Coburn 2004).

Secondly, science and technology studies (STS) provide another way to understand agency in a relationship between individual persons and technologies. While studies of changing teachers in changing schools provide important insights into how teachers and their work are changing with the surrounding society, they have not challenged the idea of agency itself. Instead of conceptualising agency in dual terms of active and passive, human and non-human, subjects and objects, or the social and the natural, research from science and technology studies argues that phenomena, whether social or natural, are not independent entities, but are continuously enacted in relationships which are heterogeneous and contingent, comprising people, techniques, and objects(Law 2004). 'Nothing becomes autonomous', as argued by John Law (Law 2004, p. 132). It is not "the social link in the relations between actors" but "how actors achieve this link in their search for what society is"(Strum and Latour 1987, p. 785) that allows us to see agency of its own. This approach to agency being constituted in various contexts has important implication for understanding changing teachers and their work lives. Studies of changing teachers in changing schools tend to make a distinction between social organization of teachers' work on the one hand and external technical influences such as education policy on the other. However, such a distinction does not help us understand teachers who become open to rapid change and uncertainty (Hargreaves 2000). Technologies are importantly shaping teachers' work while situated in different levels of contexts, that is, cultural, technical and organizational. With changes occurring at multiple levels, the idea of teachers' agency is contested, and it is rather critical to analyse how teachers enact a relationship between changing teaching environments and the reorganization of teachers' work, which constitutes contexts of changing teachers for teachers themselves.

Instead of arguing for teachers' agency and autonomy, I suggest that Touraine's ideas of the subject and subjectivation provide an alternative approach to understanding changing teachers. I demonstrate this with a case of teacher blogs. The blogs provide spaces not only of agency in their ability to inaugurate teachers' real life stories on the Internet, but also of subjectivity in the writers'

self-recognition of themselves.

2. The Ideas of the Subject and Subjectivation

In discussing a way to understand logics of actors instead of logics of systems, Touraine argues that social actors are not necessarily defined any more in the same terms that characterise the society to which they belong (Touraine 2000). Rather, social actors are closely linked with what he calls the subject, 'a creator of his social environment to the extent that he is involved with conflicts, negotiations and the struggle for freedom in the name of these rights'(Touraine 2000, pp. 908-909). Touraine draws attention to actors' own conflicts and tensions, which leads to another key idea, subjectivation. In Touraine's idea of subjectivation, social actors' 'projects' are not just individuals' tasks here, but are inseparable from changes to their environments and from actors' subjectivity. Touraine argues:

'We are not stretching the limits of our vocabulary when we propose to go beyond subjectivity to discover subjectivation, that is, the self-representation of an individual or a group as an actor, trying to impose their own ends to their environment.'(Touraine 2000, p. 911)

His idea of the subject is closely linked with actors' freedom and creativity. But the subject is not defined by the capacity to exercise freedom against determinism. Rather, according to Touraine, the subject is defined by his or her own struggle in a gap between what he calls the instrumental world and the symbolic world(Touraine 2000). He argues for the construction of the subject as a critical site of inquiry. 'Our real point of reference is not hope, but the pain of being torn apart. ... We are now experiencing a very different pathology: the impossibility of formulating "I"' (Touraine 2000, p. 55). The subject is not necessarily an actor who are linked with social relations, but the 'desire to become an actor'(Touraine 2000) . Critical for the subject to become an actor is the subject's tension to reconcile between the instrumental world and the symbolic world. He argues: 'It is because it is impossible to accept the complete dissociation of the market and community that I constructed the idea of the subject, and it in its turn make possible the idea of the social actor. (Touraine 2000)'

Touraine's ideas of subjectivation and the construction of the subject draws attention to what individuals do, not in terms of an actor's role or task performance, but in terms of individuals' personal engagements with their own tensions and conflicts. His approach provides an alternative way of exploring actors, which tends to be ignored through analytical processes both in studies of changing teachers in changing schools and in STS. On the one hand, Touaine's approach resonates with STS' view of actors in that both allow us to see interactions between actors and external environments. On the other, they differ in that the latter analyses processes in which actors reflexively objectify themselves whereas the former concerns tensions in which actors resist to

being objectified and assert themselves as subjects. Meanwhile, Touraine's argument of the construction of the subject and subjectivation also relates to the debates around teachers' personal negotiations of their identity in the context of modernisation of education system. But his approach requires analysis which is drawn from actors' representation of themselves rather than examining dialectical processes of structure and agency.

3. Storytelling as a Way Of Bridging a Gap

Informed by the ideas of the subject and subjectivation, this article considers individuals' personal teacher stories as a way of exploring the construction of the subject which bridges the instrumental word and the symbolic world. Telling a personal story is not an individualistic practice, but a social activity. It has a ritualistic dimension that transcends self-consciousness, underlining both the role of a listener as the other and a storyteller's ability to receive from others rather than influencing them (Frank 1997; Garrett 2005). For discussion of storytelling, I draw on Catherine Garrett's insights of storytelling as a ritual for ethical development. Garrett, who explores her own personal story in her study of chronic illness experience, argues for an affinity between rituals and storytelling (Garrett 2005). According to Garrett, personal storytelling as a ritual is different from rituals accommodated in religious institutions in that it emphasises bodily aspects rather than symbolic aspects of rituals. Firstly, unlike religious symbols, symbolic meanings in a personal story are not immediately given to a storytelling person, but are created in his or her 'felt image of self'. Secondly, like rituals, a story is created from daily materials at hand, but it is set aside from everyday life. Thirdly, in its repetitive practice, a ritual helps a person ease the transformation of her situation from one to another, but it is not mechanical like a routine. It is an embodied practice as it 'releases emotions in uncanny ways' (Garrett 2005). Such emotions are not necessarily linked to social relations, but are created between individuals who participate in a ritual or a story. Finally, Garrett argues for the affinity of storytelling to rituals in its ability to connect the storyteller with others. She argues that a personal story 'must be honoured' by the person telling the story and by the listener' (Garrett 2005, p. 87). Telling a personal story brings otherness to the world of a storyteller, and 'others' here are not heathens, but 'fellow others'. Garrett argues; '[e]ven when you carry out a ritual alone, you imagine someone watching your performance.' (Garrett 2005, p. 74). Thus, a personal story becomes a story about and for others in the telling (Garrett 2005). Teacher blogs, which I introduce in the latter part of this article, reveal individuals' engagements with their own teaching and working environments, which are not contained in social organisation of teachers' work anymore, but sustained in their subjective stories. In the rest of the article, my focus is on individuals' commitment to telling their own teacher stories online while repeatedly shifting their ethical orientations in their work lives.

Teachers' personal stories make the activity of teaching human, reachable for teachers themselves and communicative to others. If not in sociology textbooks, teacher stories have appeared in the forms of popular books, films, and TV dramas, portraying teachers' personal highs

and lows of classroom teaching. Such stories allow us to realise that human interactions and connections constitute an important part of teaching and learning. Ethnographic and qualitative research of teachers' work also provides rich descriptions and insights into how teachers enjoy their work (Jackson 1968; Nias 1989; Kelchtermans 1996). These studies suggest that the most important thing for teachers is interactions with students and emotional content they get from the interactions. Individual teachers define their work not so much in terms in which organizations define it as in terms of the proximity to students and their self-knowledge (Schon 1991). Individuals' personal teacher stories become critical because the stories unfold in tension with teachers' work and in the light of events and thoughts which storytellers encounter in their storytelling activities.

4. Inaugurating and Animating Teachers' Work Lives on the Internet

Between March 2005 and December 2007, I read some teacher blogs on the Internet for data and analysis of how some individuals talked about their personal experiences of being a teacher. Blogs were initially collected from teacher blogs on an education-related blog portal website (<http://education.blogmura.com/>) and from other personal blogs linked from teacher blogs on the portal site. The combination of theoretical sampling and snowball sampling was used for the selection of blogs. A total number of 13 teacher blogs were eventually chosen for close analysis. The selected blogs were further analysed in the processes of interactions between theories and data. Thematic coding was employed for the analysis of the data as it allowed comparisons between data from different sources.

Three blogs are chosen for this paper's discussion. The bloggers' writings are translated to English by me except some words in italics. The bloggers name themselves and provide some self-introduction on their blogs as translated and presented below:

1. Hopeless Teacher (*dame-kyoin*) <http://blog.livedoor.jp/damekyouin/> (a male teacher at a public high school in a rural area)
2. *Machi* http://blog.goo.ne.jp/machimachi_march (a female teacher of Japanese at a private high school in a rural area)
3. *miemin* <http://plaza.rakuten.co.jp/nonkick/> (a female high school teacher on sick leave)

Hopeless Teacher was a popular blog in a ranking of the education blog portal site during my data collection. The blog first drew my attention because of its online popularity, but later I came to read the blog more closely because of personal particularities of the blog contents. From the blog of Hopeless Teacher, I came to know a blog of *Machi* as the blog was introduced by Hopeless Teacher as his favourite teacher blog. Links from *Machi's* blog lead me to find the other blogger *miemin*. The two bloggers were not participating in the blog ranking site, and yet, were constantly receiving comments from readers when I found them. The blogs of March and *miemin* were written like personal diaries, but the contents of their writings were often conflictive, revealing the bloggers' personal struggles with work-life balance.

While the writers of blogs in this paper all self-identified themselves as teachers, they appear anonymously on the Internet. For this reason, data in this paper do not represent a ‘population’ of teachers or bloggers. Rather, they reveal subjects who represent themselves, involving the use of new media technologies. The self-representational and yet anonymous feature of teacher blogs made this paper’s analysis move from an analysis of online identity formation to an exploration of teacher stories which individual bloggers engage in telling. Some studies of personal websites and blogs draw on Erving Goffman’s analysis of the presentation of self to explore online interactions and identities in online environments(Goffman 1971). While Goffman’s identity construction draws on cognitive means, that is, information which people give and give off, this approach of analysis is helpful to understand how bloggers construct their identity in online interactions with readers, but not to understand how they identify themselves as teachers. Instead of the informational construction of identity, bloggers’ identity is made public with new information technologies. This is not to suggest that bloggers are entirely free to express themselves on their blogs. To varying degrees, what bloggers write online is shaped by their online interactions and popularity among bloggers and readers. Rather, what is at stake is bloggers’ ability to identify themselves with particular messages of their personal stories while documenting concrete occurrences of their everyday work lives.

The three blogs emerged as critical cases in my exploration of individuals’ experiences of being a teacher. They do not tell stories of ‘how I succeeded as a teacher in challenging situations’. Rather, the blog stories confront the writers, making it difficult for the bloggers to take control of presenting who they are.

Blog of Hopeless Teacher:

Hopeless Teacher is a successful blogger. His blog remained no.1 for several months in 2005 and 2006 in a blog ranking site. The blogger even published a book out of his blog writings(Iyama 2005). In contrast to its achievements as a blog, Hopeless Teacher presented on the blog is a teacher with low self-esteem. According to the blogger’s self-description, he is a hopeless teacher (*dame kyoin*) at a high school in a rural area. He finds himself nerdy and chubby as his working life is filled with his personal hobbies of video games, book reading, and heavy wine drinking, which, according to him, keeps him lonely and unfit. In this blog, it is not balance, but imbalance that takes the core of the story of Hopeless Teacher. For instance, his clumsy personal life makes a contrast to his teaching life. The following is a blog entry of Hopeless Teacher’s classroom interaction with students.

‘Title: Hopeless Teacher consults students.

During today’s class, I was discussing with students why I was never popular with women.(Some may say that I am not teaching in a class!)

Hopeless Teacher: ‘Should I learn to be a listener?’”

““Student: ‘You’d better disguise yourself in a passionate character as a teacher, like

*kinpachi-sensei*², who makes passionate educational discussions and lives with passion.’

Wait a moment. It sounds like a good advice, but it also sounds to me that I am not passionate about teaching.’”

““My students, I make this kind of chat in a class because I don’t want to bore you. I am never passionless. Rather, I am trying my best. My face was smiling and my heart was weeping³.

This classroom episode seems to be challenging and disturbing for a teacher who is to make a difference in students’ lives. In this blog entry, the blogger, as well as his readers, has to face a teacher who is vulnerable to students’ reaction and lacks in classroom control and autonomy. Such contested moments of classroom teaching appear in the story of Hopeless Teacher. However, instead of discarding or covering up awkward parts out of the story, the blogger openly writes about them. In doing so, he writes about who he claims he is as if there were others in his story.

Blog of Machi

Openly writing about contested experiences of being a teacher is also seen in stories of the other two bloggers. But unlike the blog of Hopeless Teacher, which transforms the blogger’s strange teacher experiences into a story of one clumsy person, the blogs of *Machi* and *miemin* tell more confrontational and contradictory stories as the bloggers take the stories upon themselves. A blogger *Machi* is a female teacher in a private high school in a northern rural prefecture. The blogger writes mainly of her work, and tells little about her personal life in her blog. But her personal life is indirectly narrated through her work story. Namely, when the blogger feels too busy with her work at school, she writes of her sleeping hours because according to her writings, her professional performance as a teacher becomes affected by the lack of sleep. If the blogger sleeps better, she will work better. In this association and balance between work and sleep, the blogger’s personal teacher story develops.

However, the content of *Machi*’s blog becomes increasingly complicated and contradictory as the blogger writes of two competing personal ethics in her story: satisfaction as a teacher and personal well-being. On the one hand, the blogger receives emotional content from interacting with and working with students. On the other hand, she is concerned about not looking after herself enough while working too much in school. Moreover, the source of mounting workload comes not only from her workplace, but also from her meanings of and commitment to being a teacher. For instance, in a blog entry, the blogger wrote of baking three different kinds of cookies to take to her classes next day. The event made a late night for her, but the blogger wanted to reward some students who made good efforts in class. In a following blog entry, the blogger questions herself working too much for students and little for herself. The blogger writes:

‘I feel myself almost blow up when I see other teachers listening to students with

² *Kinpachi-sensei* is a teacher character in a TV drama which appeared in the 1980s.

³ The blog entry was posted on 26 April, 2005 at <http://blog.livedoor.jp/damekyouin/>.

empathetic care. And I think “I cannot take care of other people like that”. I mean, suddenly, I feel “Why am I always looking after other people?” Then, soon after this, I realise that I am in a “dangerous state”. These days, I feel this way: “I only want to look after myself. I will blow up unless I take a rest.”⁴

The blog of *Machi* tells a story of someone who seeks to close contradictions between *Machi* the teacher and *Machi* the person. However, her reflections are countered by her physical conditions such as lack of sleep and fatigue, which occur to her on a daily basis and in which she lives.

Blog of mienin

The contradiction between being a teacher and being a person is also addressed by the other blogger *miemin*. But unlike the blog of *Machi*, the blog of *miemin* radically dissociates the blogger’s story from her workplace while telling a personal working story. The blog does not give much personal information about the blogger. But according to some references in the writings, the blogger is a teacher who seems to be working in a public high school in Greater Tokyo area. What is special about her teacher blog is that the blogger’s story is that of a teacher who was on sick leave from 2005. Her story is told between her employment conditions, her health conditions and her perception of herself as a teacher. On the one hand, the blogger becomes ashamed of herself when she thinks of many days she has been taking off from work. On the other, she writes that she cannot take responsibility for her body and her heart which don’t work against her will, and that she feels a dilemma toward herself who is contradicting.

The blogger’s sick leave story is not only personal, but is also closely linked with her workplace situations. At first, her personal story corresponded to her workplace because the blogger’s personal problem was taken care of by the school principal as a practical problem. In writing occasional meetings with the school’s principal, the blogger expresses that she appreciates how the principal listens to and shows concerns about her illness. However, as her ill conditions dragged on, the blogger could no longer be dependent on the school principal. Instead, she becomes isolated in a situation defined by her perception of working life, which is expressed in a blog entry.

‘To gain understanding from workplace is after all so difficult.

I took a sick leave. I returned to work. I took a leave of absence. I returned to work after rehabilitation work. But I took more sick leave, and returned to work. Could I take another period of sick leave?

Is the problem whether I can go to work tomorrow? I would receive another warning from school managers.

It is difficult to gain understanding about mental matters.

Others would say that I am just being truant if they saw me shopping at a supermarket.

No, no, no, no.... I should go to bed early as my doctor advises.⁵

While the blogger still feels guilty of not working in school, which seems to be shaped by

⁴ The entry was posted on 10 October, 2006 at http://blog.goo.ne.jp/machimachi_march.

⁵ The blog entry was posted on 22 May, 2007 at <http://dewdrops.seesaa.net>.

expectations from her school, her writing also questions herself about how she should be taking leave. While not finding an answer to a contradictory and personally engaged story of a teacher on sick leave, the same blogger started another blog with another blogger name, *dewdrops*. (<http://dewdrops.seesaa.net/>) The new blog is written in the figure of a mental illness patient, not a teacher on sick leave. In this blog, the blogger continues to write her personal work experiences between the expectations from her workplace and her negotiation of work life and personal life.

The above three teacher blogs do not just show the bloggers' personal reflective writings. They also develop teacher stories existing in tension with teachers' work. While existing studies of teachers' identity crisis in changing schools focus on the role of such tensions, they tend to analyse the tensions in terms of the relationship between the rationalization of education system on the one hand and individuals' private negotiations on the other (Woods and Carlyle 2002; Bolivar and Domingo 2006; Jenkins and Conley 2007). In contrast to evaluating the subjects in terms of successful outcomes of the integration of the system and actors(identity) or unsuccessful outcomes (fragmentation of meanings), the emergence of personal teachers stories on blogs draws attention to online mediations which articulate personal stories of being a teacher dispersed in individuals' representations of a strange, confrontational or contradicting person. In the next section, I compare the idea of autonomy with the idea of the subject to consider a way of understanding these emerging mediations of teacher stories.

5. Questioning Reflexive Everyday Life on Teacher Blogs

The practice of writing everyday life experiences into a personal story is commonly known as blogging. However, the bloggers do not seem to be primarily concerned that they are using blogs to articulate their views of being a teacher in public. While blogs allow individuals to express their own views about their own everyday lives, what is presented on blogs is not all the presentation of self. Rather, in writing about themselves, the writers of blogs also have to face strange sides of themselves. Blogs bring strangeness and otherness to the writers, which makes their autonomous construction of everyday experience and its continuity no longer self-evident. It is critical to consider that the bloggers' personal teacher stories are not pre-given by themselves. Rather, the stories unfold in ongoing processes in which the confluence of blog websites, blog writers, their everyday experiences and blog readers constitutes objects of reflection for those who self-identify themselves as teachers. On the one hand, the bloggers' perceptions of their work lives are more or less framed by education policies and expectations of their workplace. On the other, such a frame changes as individuals go about the writing of their working stories. Through interactions between everyday experience and a personal story, the bloggers' meanings of being a teacher are transformed, and new frames emerge in their personal stories. Blogs provide an important technology for bloggers to personally inquire processes of constructing everyday life experience while their workplace as institution of identification provide contradictions to them.

In part, the autonomous construction of everyday life is influenced by the contradictory role of information and communication technology, as suggested by Craig Calhoun. In engaging with and questioning a theoretical distinction between ‘lifeworld’ and the world of systems put forward by Jurgen Habermas, Calhoun draws attention to the proliferation of indirect relationships that challenge a sense of continuity of everyday life existence (Calhoun 1991). Rather than distinguishing lifeworld from the world of systems, he draws on ‘bonds felt among people who take as an important part of their personal identity’ (Calhoun 1991). According to Calhoun, because of the ‘mediation of some combination of information-processing technologies and complex organisations’, people increasingly identify themselves with those who they have never met. These identity expressions are not only mediated but also misplaced as people imagine themselves as members of some ‘imagined communities’ which entail varieties of ‘personal matters’ as well as individuals’ self-affirmations (Calhoun 1991). Everyday challenges experienced by individual teachers are illustrated in literature on teachers’ identity crisis and transformation. But as individuals negotiate their everyday experiences with the use of ICT, “great systems of social organization” makes everyday experience not only intimate but indirect. As a result, sites of identification diverge with varieties of identity expressions rather than being integrated (Calhoun 1991).

Meanwhile, the idea of the subject introduces different values to individuals’ use of blogs while they are engaging with their personal subject matters. Over the course of writing a blog, the bloggers develop their meanings of working as a teacher. Such meanings do not necessarily correspond to the occupational settings of their workplace. Instead, the bloggers create new environments in which they work on the construction of their everyday life. For instance, the blogger *miemin*, who had been on sick leave, brings her personal concern of well-being to the central issue in her work life. When asked by the school principal to decide between a full-time come-back or a resignation from the teaching job, she refuses to make a choice. Instead, she makes a claim of what she wants on her blog. The blogger writes:

‘The important thing about work is not whether you are the right person for it, but whether you want to do it nor not, isn’t it? I could say that I wanted to take a rest! I will ask for a medical certificate tomorrow in order to keep working. This is not that I am a loser, but that I am taking a rest.’⁶

The blogger *miemin* stops writing her blogs shortly after this post. According to what she wrote in her last entry, she seems to have left the teaching position. But her blog is not about a teacher who was on sick leave and left the teaching job. Isolated in the blogger’s personal story, the blog of *miemin* shows us a particular way of social alienation. In her story, the blogger not only feels lost in her school’s bureaucracy which only gives cold responses to her claimed health conditions, but she loses the meaning of participating in it. What is critical in this loss is that the blogger does so with her personal ethics of telling her work story.

For the blogger *miemin*, and to varying degrees, for the bloggers Hopeless Teacher and *Machi*,

⁶ The blog entry was posted on 11 June, 2007 at <http://dewdrops.seesaa.net/>.

life as a teacher is too complex and unpredictable to be perfect. The teacher blogs reveal that it is unrealistic for the bloggers to remove tensions and inconsistencies in their work lives, which cannot be resolved by individualistic and self-contained management of work lives. Rather, their stories allow the bloggers to encounter self-revealing realities of teachers' contradictory work lives. While the three bloggers express their rejection to be torn away between work life and personal life, their stories are not all directed toward the autonomous construction of their everyday life, but also focus on personal subject matters strange to the bloggers' teacher identity. Emerging self-representational writings on blogs call for new ways of understanding teachers' work lives beyond the one shaped by social organization of teachers' work. In the conclusion section, I consider how the idea of the subject contributes to understanding changing teachers.

6 Conclusion

This paper shed light on some individuals' stories of work experiences written on the Internet. I particularly examined three teacher blogs written by those who talk about their contested teacher experiences. Telling a story is a reflexive activity, and has been an important part of teachers' work for teachers to make the activity of teaching possible and sustainable. But contemporary teaching environments in the surrounding global society introduce various features of practices into their work, such as market-competition, innovative pedagogies and youth culture, which challenge individual teachers' professional autonomy (Hargreaves 2000). In the face of increasing demands of public education and diverse realities of individual students, teachers' bottom-up initiatives are critical for individuals to negotiate their work lives in changing schools. On the one hand, individuals' storytelling construction of teacher identity with new information technology seems to mark a step toward teachers' self-management of demanding work life. However, on the other hand, the case of teacher blogs points to the bloggers' keen awareness and openness about a gap between a teacher's work and their personal realities in telling their teacher experiences.

To include teacher blogs in an analysis of changing teachers in changing schools, this paper drew on the ideas of the subject and subjectivation as a method of analysis. The ideas offer a new way to research actors. However, they also reshape the image of social life and subsequent research questions worthy of exploring. Touraine argues:

‘The unity of analysis in classical sociology originated in the unity of the social system of society. This unity has disappeared but it is replaced by the unity of the subject itself with its reference to self and no longer to an external or transcendental principle of order.’(Touraine 2003, p.127)

The shift from an analysis of systems to an analysis of the subject suggests an important implication for understanding school teachers today and developing teacher education policy that reaches individual teachers. The idea of the subject does not just point to a new way of analysis replacing the old one. It also allows us to see the desire of the subject to have the unity of itself.

Research and policy on changing teachers in changing schools are increasingly focused on the agentic capacity of school teachers in relation to education policy changes and changing teaching environments. And yet, they largely remain ambiguous about how individual teachers are integrated into the education system together with education policies and changing teaching environments. The idea of the subject turns this question upside down. It encourages a researcher to reconsider personal challenges and conflicts which individual teachers face as an analytical basis for understanding that integration can be reconfigured at the level of individuals' demands. Acknowledge emerging teaching environments claimed by the subject provides significant opportunities not to overlook teachers' personal behaviours when schools are facing the limitations of their order and control.

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