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How we developed both inside and outside a “games and multiliteracies” seminar: A comparison of a society-focused journey and a self-focused journey

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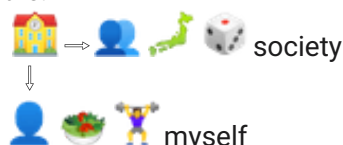
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Key points

- **What is this?** This is a comparison of our self-finding journeys in the Game Terakoya seminar. One of us focused on society and one of us focused on herself.
- **Why did you make it?** We found it interesting that, even though we were in the same seminar, we followed different paths based on our curiosities, interests and skills, and we developed different skills in different ways. We want to share our experiences with other teachers who are thinking about using games.
- **Who is it for?** This is for teachers who are interested in the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies and games. We also want future students in the Game Terakoya to be inspired and to be eager to do something for their future.

Tweet synopsis

Teachers: help students believe in themselves. Students can do more than you think they can with your help. Believe in them. They will develop on various paths!



Read our paper. You'll see - it works!

#WeAreStillOnAJourneyAndAreStillThinkingAboutCatchyHashtags

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Introduction

Hello teachers, do you want to see some real examples of how students developed their interests and skills in a university class? This paper shows our real changes. We hope this article provides you with some beneficial information about multiliteracies education from students' perspectives.

Background

The purpose of the Game Terakoya (GT) seminar is to develop ourselves through connecting with others and society by using games (deHaan, 2019). And also, to make our society better. The GT was created because games are not only fun, but also useful from an educational perspective. Everyone is familiar with games. For both of us, the GT seminar is a place where we can be honest and relax, and where we can pursue our curiosity.

The Game Terakoya seminar adapts the learning process of the "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies," (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996) in which students develop their interests, deepen their knowledge and adapt what they learned or gained into real life. Following the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, the Game Terakoya has four stages of learning: Experiencing, Conceptualizing, Analyzing, and Applying. In the Game Terakoya, "Experiencing" is mainly the time to encounter new games. Then we discuss the games ("Conceptualizing"), do further research ("Analyzing"), and adapt the game and our ideas into society as 'participatory projects' ("Applying").

In the GT seminar, students have lots of assignments on documents, and activities inside and outside the university. We are able to do research, do projects related to our interests, and develop our skills through these activities. Students can think about themselves deeply by working on the worksheets¹ made by Prof. deHaan, and may find their interests through the assignments even if they are not sure what they are interested in or do not have clear ideas for participatory projects at the start.

Students can think about themselves deeply by working on the worksheets.

It isn't enough that teachers teach and give new knowledge to students with correct answers. Students should have opportunities to think and develop new experiences freely in a very subjective way in school education (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996). And then, by connecting to real-world society with new learning, our horizons broaden in quite different fields.

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With multiliteracies, students are encouraged to study in various ways, not only in classes but also outside the school. Students should not be given specific answers. Rather, they should think by themselves through their old and new experiences (the pedagogy of multiliteracies' "experiencing" stage includes both). This helps them think deeply about their studies. Our conclusion is that, by adapting multiliteracies, teachers can remove the limitations of the current situation of literacy education such as lack of social opportunities or inequalities in education. As a result, we believe that students can be more confident with a new style of learning, and develop "their own" interests, knowledge and skills which differ from student to student. Then, knowledge and skills they acquire can be useful and valuable not just for their student life but beyond that for their respective whole life.

¹ Questions helped us think about ourselves. On the Pre Materials, we had to answer questions like "What are your long term personal / educational / professional goals?" and "What social problems are you aware of?" and "Do you play games with your family members or friends? If so, how and why?" and "How do you want to grow in the next 2 / 5 / 10 years?" and "What have been some of your best / worst experiences in school?" and "What school-based activities do you (want to) do outside of classes?" On the Game Interests page, we had to answer questions like "List some Game Lab games that you are interested in." and "Why are you interested in this game?"

The pedagogy of multiliteracies' "applying" stage (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996) connects school learning and life after school.

By adapting multiliteracies, teachers can remove the limitations of the current situation of literacy education such as lack of social opportunities or inequalities in education.

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Our Journeys in the Game Terakoya

Kazuna's journey

In the seminar, I created an original board game for children to learn about Japanese culture and I played it with children at a local event which other students and I held. In this section, I will show my journey briefly.

At the beginning of the seminar, even though I was slightly interested in holding public events, my interests were mainly in learning foreign languages and cultures. I started being interested in other countries after visiting America when I was eight. Later in high school, I increased my interests towards other cultures by learning about the world's divergent geographical characteristics, climates, industries, foods, languages, religions and so on. I enjoy learning about cultures and languages that are new to me and I cannot find in Japan. In the "experiencing" stage of the seminar, I encountered a board game named "10 Days in Europe," in which players make 10-day trip schedules using a map and cards. Then I started to think about creating my original game in which players can learn other cultures while having fun.

However, I changed my theme from foreign culture to Japanese culture after I visited Malta on a study abroad program. During my stay there, I was often asked about Japan by flatmates, teachers and other people I met, many of whom seemed to be very interested in Japanese foods, spots to visit and traditional things. However, I and other Japanese students sometimes couldn't answer them because of the lack of our knowledge about Japan. In contrast, people from other countries knew about their own countries and cultures well. This experience helped me realize that Japanese people including me have to know more about our own country especially in this era of globalization, so I decided to create a board game where players can learn Japanese culture.

The steps of creating a game for my participatory project were trial and error. I made my first prototype game, and played it with others. Then I found some points to be changed, and received feedback from them. I revised and playtested it many times. For example, in the first prototype game, all players are supposed to travel on a map of Japan from Hokkaido to Okinawa on a one-way road to get items in each area. Then one of the seminar students pointed out that the information about Hokkaido and Tohoku can be easily forgotten by the players because they appear only in early stages of the game. Then I decided to put three starting points in eastern, middle and western parts of Japan, and let players choose where to start. I also introduced some branch points and an airport system to make players able to move freely on the map. In the process of making the game, I tried to think a lot about how to make it better in terms of strategy, and to make it enjoyable and beneficial for my players: kids.

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At the event, kids seemed to be enjoying the game a lot, and also, all the kids answered they increased their interests towards Japanese culture. In the simple questionnaire I took, the average response of how much the kids were interested in Japanese culture increased from 3.1 to 3.8 on a 4 point scale (Furusawa, 2021). I was happy to see them get new interests of Japanese culture. At the same time, I increased my knowledge about Japan and creative thinking skills as well. In the process of making the game, I learned lots of new things such as foods and places famous in other parts of Japan. For example, I didn't know that "Nikko Toshogu" is located in Tochigi, "Sasa dango" is famous in Niigata, and "Kazura-soba" is a specialty in Yamaguchi. It was surprising for me that each region, even though each is part of Japan, has its own unique culture. Also my creative thinking skill has developed by trying to change rules to make the game work better. I also learned how to work well as a team through the experiences of having an event with other seminar members. This experience also increased my interest in having local events in the future, so my future vision became clearer in this regard.

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Figure 1: Kids and seminar students playing the game at the game event

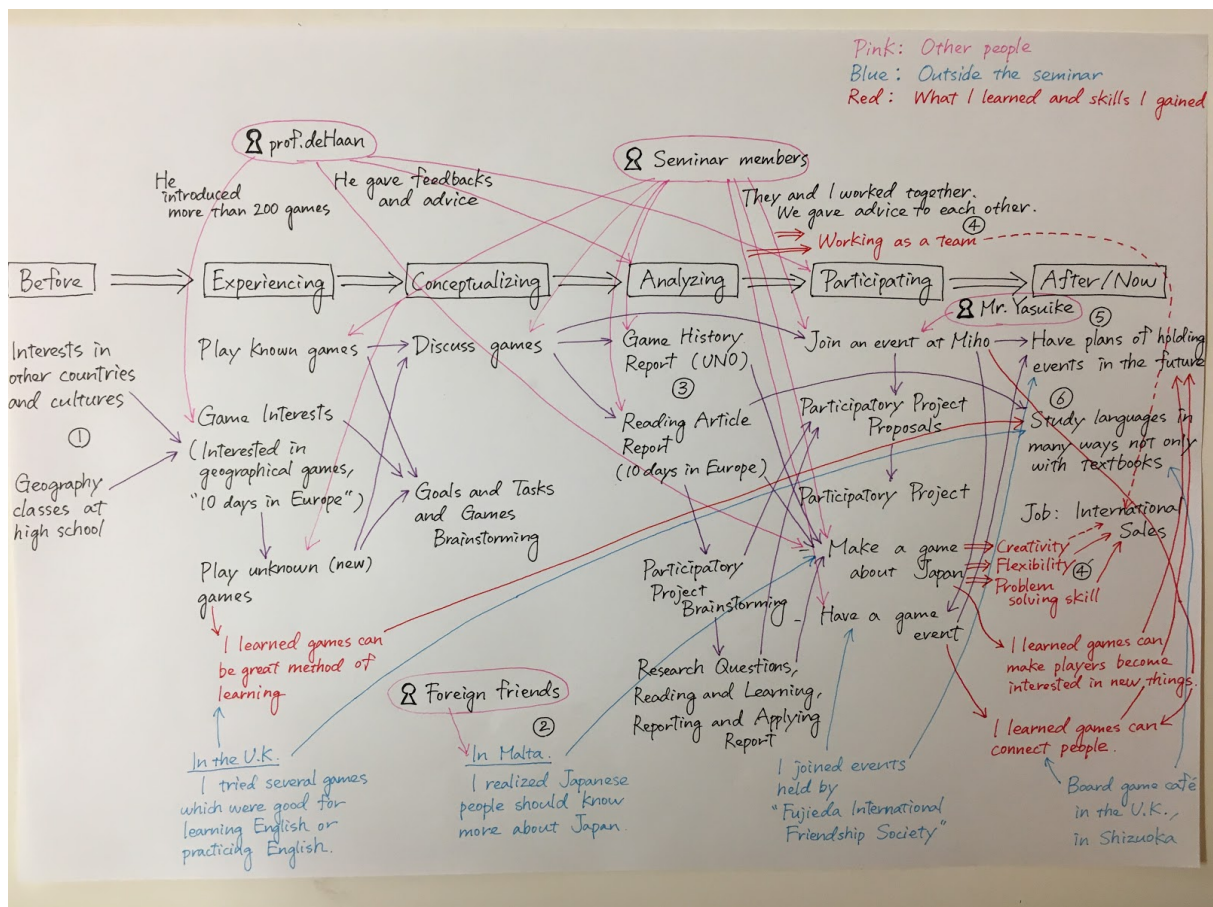


Figure 2: Kazuna's visual journey

Haruna's journey

I had been interested in healthy living and food before the beginning of the seminar. However, by talking and sharing information about diets with Prof. deHaan (in the conceptualizing and analysis stages of the seminar), I realised that I not only love cooking and eating delicious food, but also care about food nutrition and staying in shape. I also challenged a carbs restriction diet with him and I had a great result. From this experience, I'm still on a carbs restriction diet continuously as a daily habit and my health awareness has been much increased through the seminar. That's why I decided to pick up 'healthy food' for the main theme of my participatory project. Both I and my professor started dieting together at the same time, my professor proposed the project by showing examples, but I started my diets by myself.

My participatory project was to face changing myself through nutrition and exercise. Many people in the seminar tried to output their knowledge to others, but I treasured my inner change more than focusing on other people's change. I focused on myself and shared myself on social media. Other people who care about nutrition could look at my journey on Instagram. I participated in my learning by working to transform myself for myself.

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I actually acted as an ovolactovegetarian (a person who eats eggs and dairy, but not meat or fish) for about 4 months. What this project is wonderful for is that I can be happier by having healthy food while saving money, losing weight, and caring for environmental problems. I had a great experience being a vegetarian and having the sense of connection with the environment.

Gradually, I became more interested in changing myself and my inner feelings. I conducted this project for my happiness and self content. I wanted to change my appearance and show evidence of my change to my family. I wanted people to see my change, and I wanted people who had been negative to me to recognize my efforts. I was positive about myself and this project and I became to have much more confidence in myself. It is because I really put great effort in this project to succeed and my appearance also changed a lot. Now I like myself more than before the seminar started. I can say that I'm proud of myself and I love myself with big confidence. I have higher self-esteem compared with before my challenge and I'm happy.

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Lastly, I think I understand myself more. For example, I'm interested in food companies because I love food. Joining the seminar and sharing opinions with a teacher and other students often gave me chances to open my eyes and taught me to be honest with myself. I believed in myself and pursued my happiness: my appearance first of all, and secondly the food that changed my appearance. After this project, I was inspired by this experience and I decided to continue my lifestyle with a plant-based diet. I'm a flexitarian now and enjoy food flexibly, and I'm also on a low carbs diet. I feel so good both physically and mentally these days.

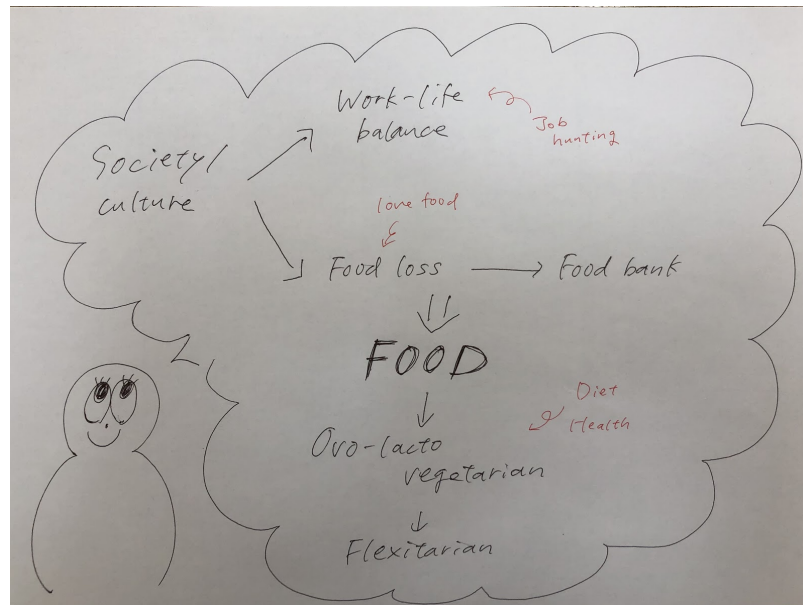


Figure 3: The path Haruna reached to her project

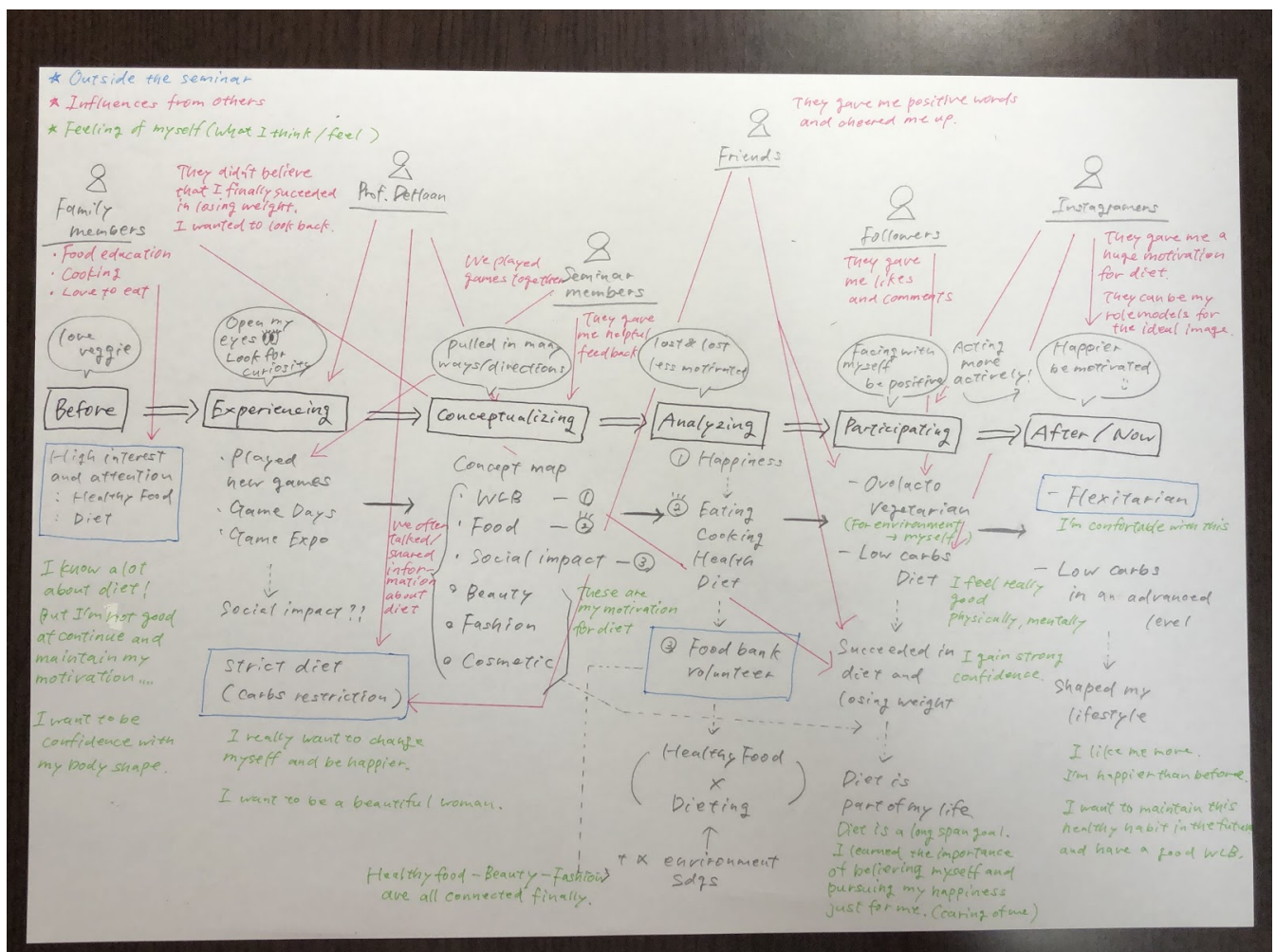


Figure 4: Haruna's visual journey

Comparison and contrast reflection

We see the differences between our journeys. Although we were in the same seminar and in the same curriculum of Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, we actually traced completely different steps.

In Kazuna's journey, she focused on society and other people. She created an original game and held a local event for kids to have a good time playing games and learning Japanese cultures.² In the process of that, she was always thinking about how to make the game/event better "for participants." Of course she wanted to develop her knowledge and skills, and she actually increased her understanding of Japanese cultures, creative thinking skills and skills of working as a team (and these were great changes!), but the processes of making the game and preparing for the event were mainly for participants, not directly for herself. She was very happy to see kids enjoying playing her game and learning about Japan, and hoped that the experiences would help kids to enjoy Japanese cultures by talking with people from different countries about Japan or visiting around Japan in the future.

In the process of that, she was always thinking about how to make the game/event better "for participants."

On the other hand, Haruna mainly focused on the change in herself. After playing lots of games to broaden her thinking, thinking deeply about social problems and considering possible projects (she used concept maps to clarify her thoughts), she finally found the topic that she could dive really deep in and that was food, health and diet. She faced herself again and again just with her intuition. Being honest and believing herself to be comfortable with the project was one of the key elements. As a result, she lost a lot of weight and it totally changed her life in a good way. What was the most amazing thing for her is that she achieved her ideal goals for her body and got higher self-esteem. Before, she was nervous and stressed out so it's obvious that she can say that she likes herself more now. It's obvious that she can say that she likes herself more who put so much effort into changing herself than before she was nervous and stressed out due to her body shape. One of the lessons that she learned is to believe in herself no matter what other people say. There was a time (another period of 'experiences') that her family didn't cheer her on for her diet because they didn't expect that she could really lose her weight. They sometimes said to her some words that she might be less motivated for diet and that frustrated her a lot. However, she never gave up because she wanted to change herself and prove them wrong in that way. It was not easy to maintain her stoic lifestyle mentally, however she just believed in herself and talked to other people who gave her a lot of energy. After all, she recognized her changes gradually and she can say that she did it in the right way.

Being honest and believing herself to be comfortable with the project was one of the key elements.

Message to teachers

We increased our interests and gained our own values through the activities inside and outside the seminar. Our teacher gave us materials and assignments inside of school that made us think about ourselves and our interests and connected academic and life ideas (such as language and culture). And, we also experienced society outside of school. For example, we joined local events, and such experiences connected with our journeys. From those experiences, we found we learned a lot from the experiences outside the school. We didn't just learn inside the school education. In addition, we realized that it is highly important that teachers help students to find their own values and curiosity. By

² Kazuna had already been interested in making games at the start of the seminar. She was not particularly influenced by previous students' game design work or examples. But, by seeing other students' events, she became more interested in holding a public event, and decided to plan and hold one of her own. She had had vague interests in holding local events, so seeing other students' examples of events as final projects made her think that holding an event was a realistic project for her to work on.

doing so, students will be motivated more and more, and create their own paths like we both did. Thus, we recommend that teachers should let their students have activities both inside and outside school. We also believe teachers should create and have more chances of discussions to make students active in having their opinions and expressing these opinions to others, and chances to let them think about their own curiosities by asking about them. That makes students learn in their own beneficial ways, and find their lifelong goals or values.

TEACHING TIP

Teachers should create and have more chances of discussions to make students active in having their opinions and expressing these opinions to others, and chances to let them think about their own curiosities by asking about them.

Acknowledgements

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Kazuna's Game

Go Round Japan: A game to learn the geography and culture of Japan. [Main map](#) & [player boards](#) & [rules](#).



