# MA Education TEFL dissertation prize winner 2011

Chisato Danjo

## Fostering cultural understanding in Japanese primary school pupils through “Foreign Language Activities”

'It was a great honour for me to have been chosen as the recipient of this award! The experience in this thought-provoking TEFL course was much more than wonderful, which consequently led me to a further studying on the PhD programme. I’m grateful to excellent lecturers and classmates for sharing such splendid time with me!'

**Abstract**

Since recent globalisation has brought ample opportunities of communication beyond cultural boundaries, not only linguistic understanding but cultural understanding have been required in second/foreign language education. To react to this demand, a concept of culture has been theorised in recent research, which regards nature of culture as dynamic, multi-dimensional and situated. Compared with such theoretical developments, however, far less empirical research has been conducted; therefore, this study took a new curriculum “Foreign Language Activities” (FLA) in Japan as a case study, and critically examined its practical objectives and implementation by analysing interpretations of cultural understanding in three data sources: government policy documents, textbooks, and teachers’ interviews, according to four cultural models. A combination of critical discourse analysis and content analysis was employed for examining policy documents and textbooks, and an interpretative approach was adopted for interviews. This study found that documents and textbooks tended to see culture from nation-oriented and essentialist perspectives, which may cause unhelpful stereotyping, whereas teachers’ practices attempted to embrace cultural complexity in the local context. Involving local cultural reality in teaching was found to be a key for fostering cultural understanding, which suggests that bottom-up perspectives should be encouraged for teacher training.



© University of Birmingham 2015