Revisiting and Extending Duoethnographies: Reflections on Research, Development, and Practice

Robert J. Lowe
Ochanomizu University

Daniel Hooper
Tokyo Kasei University

Luke Lawrence
Nihon University

Matthew W. Turner
Tokyo University of Science

Nick Kasparek
Eikei University of Hiroshima

Duoethnography is an innovative and accessible research method that is rapidly gaining popularity and recognition in the social sciences, as well as within applied linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT). In this paper, we introduce the research method, clearly outline the steps needed to conduct a duoethnography, and offer suggestions to how it may be used in the ELT field: as a research methodology, as a form of professional development, and as pedagogical practice. The introduction and overview are followed by critical reflections by three sets of duoethnographers as they revisit and extend previous duoethnography projects in order to highlight how engaging in a duoethnography helped them to learn as a researcher, grow as professionals, and improve classroom practice, respectively. As well as reinforcing the idea that published research represents only one step on an intellectual and professional continuum, we hope that the paper inspires readers to engage in their own duoethnographic projects to match their personal interests, needs and circumstances.

Keywords: duoethnography, eikaiwa, special educational needs, reflective practice, project-based learning

Duoethnography is an emerging research methodology that has been gaining traction in the social sciences over the last several years. Pioneered by Joe Norris and Richard Sawyer in the US, duoethnography has now entered the field of English language teaching (ELT) and has found a home with a small community of ELT researchers in Japan. In this paper we introduce the methodology of duoethnography and reflect on its varied uses to date in ELT, as showcased in the recent book Duoethnography in English Language Teaching: Research, Reflection, and Classroom Application (Lowe & Lawrence, 2020).

In basic terms, duoethnography has been defined as "a collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers of difference juxtapose their life histories to provide multiple understandings of the world" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 9). Rooted in poststructuralism and social justice, duoethnography embraces the subjectivity of ethnographic research by making the researcher the site (but, crucially, not the subject) of the research. And by juxtaposing life histories, researchers working collaboratively are encouraged to examine taken for granted truths and disrupt these grand narratives (Sawyer & Norris, 2013).

Duoethnographies capture a moment in the process of research or teacher development, but those processes

themselves do not end with the published work. These are ongoing, iterative processes of reflection, of which the duoethnography represents only one juncture, at one particular moment in time. As such, in this paper, we return to some of the duoethnographies published in Lowe & Lawrence (2020), and extend these published works by adding reflective commentaries from the vantage point of the present.

It is not necessary for readers to be familiar with the previously published duoethnographies mentioned here in order to benefit from the insights of this paper. The main purpose of the present paper is to highlight the affordances that we received from carrying out duoethnographies and to show how it affected our subsequent teaching and research practices. This is done with a view to encouraging readers to engage in their own duoethnographic projects, whether that be for research, professional development, or as a form of pedagogical practice.

How to Conduct a Duoethnography

As with any research project, researchers first decide on a topic to investigate. They then engage in multiple recorded discussions (these can be spoken conversations or written dialogic correspondences, for example, online messaging) using their own life histories to examine the research topic under investigation. This data is then transcribed (if the dialogue was carried out as written correspondence, of course this step is not necessary) and the researchers look for salient themes that emerge from the data. Once themes have been identified and agreed upon, transcript extracts are then chosen and reconstructed as 'play scripts' into readable and accessible dialogues. These data dialogues form the heart of the duoethnography. The final report can take many forms. For example, researchers may choose to write a traditional research paper with a literature review, dialogues as data, and discussion and findings. Alternatively, researchers may choose to present the entire report as a dialogue, weaving in references to the literature as a natural part of the dialogue.

Uses of Duoethnography

Duoethnography was originally conceived of as a form of qualitative research, which first saw use in education, health, and related areas of social science (see Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012). While it has primarily continued to be used in this way, its range of application has diversified in recent years. Alongside its use in research, duoethnography has also been employed as a form of reflective practice in education, in which two (or more) teachers compare and contrast their teaching experiences in order to gain insights from one another and critically question their practices (see Sawyer & Norris, 2016; Norris & Sawyer, 2016). Another way duoethnography has been used recently is as an activity in foreign language teaching. By getting students to engage in creating a duoethnography, teachers have sought to develop speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills, and also to encourage positive group dynamics and greater interpersonal communication in the classroom (see Part 3 of Lowe & Lawrence, 2020).

Overview of The Paper

The authors of this paper were all recently involved in an edited book project in which these three uses of duoethnography were explored (Lowe & Lawrence, 2020). This paper was inspired by a forum the authors convened at a conference in 2020 (see the Appendix for links to the recordings of these), and with some distance now between ourselves and the project, we would like to use this space to reflect on our experiences of engaging in duoethnographies as researchers, reflective practitioners, and language educators. In the first section, Daniel Hooper will provide his personal

reflections on conducting a duoethnography with two Japanese colleagues into perceptions and experiences working in *eikaiwa* (conversation schools). In the second section, Matthew W. Turner and Nick Kasparek will reflect on their discussions surrounding teaching students with special educational needs, and how their duoethnography was used as a basis for stimulating further exploration. In the final section, Robert J. Lowe and Luke Lawrence will reflect, through dialogue, on their experiences of using duoethnography with their students. One key component of duoethnography is the retention of the researchers' voice in the finished paper. To this end, the reader may notice a shift in writing and presentation style between sections. This is left intentionally so and reflects the individuality of each duoethnography project.

Part 1:
Different, Not Better: Reflections on a Research Duoethnography
Daniel Hooper

Eikaiwa (private English conversation) schools are known in the field of Japanese ELT and the broader expat community in Japan as a ubiquitous but often stigmatized entry-level teaching context (Hooper & Hashimoto, 2020). In a trioethnography with Momoko Oka and Aya Yamazawa, two Japanese eikaiwa teachers, I was provided the chance to explore our different experiences of *eikaiwa* teaching and critically explore our frequently conflicting perspectives on this teaching sector (Hooper, Oka & Yamazawa, 2020). In this short reflective piece, I will describe some of the key things I learned from our trioethnography and discuss what I feel are the implications of my experience working on this project for the potential future role of duoethnography (or trioethnography!) in our field. Of course, I cannot speak for Momoko and Aya and their perspectives on our study, so the reader

must remember that this is one narrow and subjective account from one member of a three-person team and should not assume that my experiences in any way represents those of my co-researchers.

I was initially drawn to this project largely due to my pre-existing interest in research into *eikaiwa* schools and because of the valuable opportunity to hear the experiences and perspectives of Japanese *eikaiwa* teachers. In the school I was working at, Japanese staff were predominantly positioned in administrative roles with "native speakers"[1] being designated the primary teaching staff. Due in part to this institutional positioning, I and many other colleagues in our school came to internalize a sense of "us" and "them": foreign "teachers" and Japanese "administrators/salespeople," each with conflicting priorities. Therefore, discussing pedagogy in *eikaiwa* with two Japanese teachers was a fantastic opportunity for me at that time. Furthermore, as I was already actively conducting research within *eikaiwa* schools and reading a great deal of the academic literature on *eikaiwa* and related issues such as native-speakerism and the commodification of English in Japan, I saw our trioethnography as a way to explore whether or not the existing claims from research were congruent with what Momoko and Aya were experiencing in their schools.

Unearthing New Perspectives

I am unable to describe our study in detail due to word limits and the absence of my co-researchers. However, I can say that the dialogues with Momoko and Aya stimulated my questioning of two grand narratives I had previously subscribed to: 1) *eikaiwa* being a uniform context with negligible variation between schools and

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[1] The term "native speaker" is displayed in quote marks here due to my assertion that this distinction is socially constructed based on race and nationality rather than purely linguistic factors (Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016; Moussu & Llurda, 2008).

2) the "us" and "them" relationship between Japanese and non-Japanese staff. My eyes were opened to the broader lived experiences of other teachers who were actively negotiating a range of different affordances and constraints within their schools and doing this through the lens of their own unique personal histories. Listening to Momoko and Aya's experiences challenged not only my own personal biases formed through my narrow perspective on *eikaiwa* but also my tendency at that time to view existing research claims as unquestionable. I remember on a few occasions during our study where I would stubbornly insist that our perspectives on certain topics were not congruent with what academics (many of whom had never worked in *eikaiwa*!) had theorized. This was, I feel, in some part due to my lack of experience and confidence as a researcher. I would often assume that if someone had a paper in a high-tier journal that their perspective was unassailable and that everything I was experiencing "on the ground" could (or should) be interpreted through an established theoretical model. What our trioethnography taught me in this sense was that research should reflect experience or practice rather than the other way around. Due to this realization, what I initially thought to be one of the greatest difficulties in conducting our study—an imbalance in terms of familiarity with the relevant academic literature—was perhaps one of our greatest strengths. Momoko and Aya's desire to keep our study grounded in our actual experiences was crucial in keeping our study relevant and valuable to others in *eikaiwa*. If we had all spent the years before the study immersing ourselves in academic perspectives on *eikaiwa* and the issues surrounding it our study may have been in danger of becoming a mere parroting of extant theories with questionable value to either teaching or research spheres.

Duoethnography Bridging Research and Practice

When considering the implications of our study and the potential benefits of duoethnography for the dual spheres of teaching and research, I initially considered the accessibility of duoethnography to both researchers and readers as offering a means of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for teachers in the research community. However, I soon dismissed this idea on the basis that it was flawed and chauvinistic. Why should teachers necessarily desire to gain access to this research sphere? One could, with some confidence, argue that the teaching community needs researchers far less than the other way around. Rather than teachers basing what they do in the classroom on formal research findings, pedagogic skills and knowledge generally develop out of individual experience or participation in a professional community of practice (Medgyes, 2017). That being said, from my own perspective, engaging in research while teaching has most certainly stimulated positive development in both areas. I do believe that "teacher" and "researcher" roles can be reconciled and in many cases with positive results. However, rather than considering duoethnographic research as a means of inviting teachers into the realm of the researcher, I prefer to see duoethnographies as a "boundary object" (Wenger, 1998): artifacts through which different communities may gain understanding of the interconnections between their distinct practices. Instead of, as I was guilty of in our study, framing knowledge from certain communities as more legitimate than others, I believe duoethnographies offer a means of developing researchers' understanding of and respect for teaching knowledge. Of course, I do not suggest that this is without obstacles. During a presentation that we did at a recent conference, one of the audience members asked us an important question about the realities of publishing

duoethnographies. Naturally, there is little point in creating a boundary object if we are unable to disseminate it for use by those in the field. The attitude towards innovative research methodologies such as duoethnography by many journals is indeed a cause for concern and may at times result in the accessibility and egalitarianism of duoethnographic research being compromised (Hooper & Iijima, 2019). That being said, the other participants in our forum agreed that the tide does indeed appear to be (slowly) turning regarding the recognition of duoethnography as "valid" research. My hope is that future duoethnographies can continue to chip away at prevalent conceptions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge in our field, thus creating new possibilities for empowerment and inter-community learning.

Part 2:
Reassembling the Puzzle: Returning to Our Duoethnography
Matthew W. Turner & Nick Kasparek

In our previous duoethnography (Kasparek & Turner, 2020), which detailed an exploration of our experiences around supporting students with disabilities (SWDs) in English language learning, we concluded that while the study captured "our thoughts, feelings and orientations in that particular period, our ideas about this complex topic have continued to develop since" (p. 130). Our current project sees us investigating this continued development by reflecting upon the data and our thinking in the earlier duoethnography as a way to spur further collaborative dialogue on the complex topic of special educational needs instruction and language teaching. Here, we look for how our orientations may have transformed. As such, we use the terms "reassemble" and "puzzle" in this project's title to demonstrate our belief that our understandings of the theme in question remain in a state of construction, discovery, and review. Although

a core theme of our shared inquiry involves the negotiation of definitions regarding inclusive education from a non-expert perspective, for clarity purposes and with respect to the limited space, our project broadly describes situations in which institutions respond to individual learner needs so that these differences do not hinder learning (Kormos, 2020). For educators working in Japanese higher education, such responses are gaining further significance on account of the 2016 implementation of the Act on the Elimination of Disability Discrimination, which has contributed to the increasing numbers of SWDs entering university (see JASSO, 2020). It is in this spirit that we continue to pursue our professional and personal learning of related issues.

New Conceptual Pieces to the Puzzle

We framed our first project as puzzling through the process of becoming teachers of SWDs, which involved finding pieces of the puzzle as much as arranging them into a coherent picture. In this next iteration of puzzling together, we found that we had yet more pieces to add, which changed how everything fit together. In particular, new concepts prompted reconfigurations, opened up new understandings, and allowed for growth in perceptions. We decided to use our part of the follow-up conference forum (see the Appendix) as the site for new dialogic inquiry to take place, in which the audience could observe the genuine unfolding of our learning in real time. In returning to our duoethnography, we take inspiration from Brown (2015) by using an earlier duoethnograhic study as a site for critical reexamination to glean further understandings. Several concepts that were raised in this new dialogue invited especially dramatic shifts.

Medical and Social Models

First, while our original chapter briefly referred to critiques of the dominant medical model of disability, it was not until this

renewed reflection that the positive concept of the social model emerged as a central component for both of us. In short, while the medical model locates a problem, deficiency, or deviation from a supposed healthy norm in individual students, the social model instead emphasizes the failure of society, of institutions, as actively disabling those who do not fit what we construct and maintain (see Hogan, 2019). In this light, a focus on diagnosing students as deserving of accommodation or not appears misplaced at best. A social model, by contrast, demands deeper changes in our own practices, institutions, and societies. In this vein, Matt reflected that although the term "difficulty" in reference to students with learning difficulties had troubled both of us from our early conversations, the concept of the social model illuminated why locating difficulties in students rather than in structures was so problematic. Similarly, Nick reflected that it is easy to revert to the medical model as a default mode of thinking in current systems, so repeated reflection on the social model becomes critical for lasting change. At the same time, we continued to question whether the medical model might still be strategically useful for prioritizing particular needs.

Misfitting

Second, the social model led us to concepts that have altered how we see the challenges of change. Garland-Thomson's (2011, 2014) concept of misfitting helped to refine our understanding of the dynamic reciprocal relationships of particular human bodies in particular environments in our shared constructed world. While this world tends to provide fitting, sustaining environments for those in the majority, we might all find ourselves "disabled" by spaces as they are currently configured, and "become disabled when what seemed to be the unremarkable and familiar bodies that we inhabit encounter an unsustaining environment" (Garland-Thomson, 2014,

Misfitting section, para. 4). Rather than an occasion for despair, though, this can become a powerful prompt for creativity toward mutual adaptation and steps toward truly universal design. As Garland-Thomson (2011) explains, "the formative experience of slamming against an unsustaining environment can unsettle our and others' occurrences of fitting" (p. 597). This became a central theme of Nick's reflections, in particular, as he repeatedly emphasized an expanding perception of misfitting and the ensuing need to be useful to more students by helping to construct more fitting spaces, or "shelter" (see Ahmed, 2019). Matthew also emphasized that all of our diversity work on disability issues must be fundamentally for students.

Accessibility

Third, and building on this idea of orientation toward students being disabled by current educational environments, we turned to the concept of accessibility. While the idea of universal design for learning (UDL), an inclusive teaching methodology (see Capp, 2017), had been a concluding orientation in our original duoethnography, we asked in this further reflection how accessibility in more intersectional terms relates to our and our institutions' responsibilities. As an example of this, Matthew spent some time discussing an ongoing personal project regarding the development of language learning materials and professional knowledge around the subject of accessible tourism. In fact, as he learned more about the tourism industry, the umbrella term "accessibility" emerged as potentially central to guiding further inquiry. It became increasingly clear that paying attention to accessibility has broad implications in multiple fields, industries, and discourses, even beyond disability-oriented themes. While this broadening seems important, we reflected again that it also seems critical to retain a special focus on accessibility in disability terms.

Reflective Summary

Our reflections introduced new concepts that have, albeit temporarily, coalesced into a more complex image of the whole. Here, we have emphasized that the social model of disability, especially conceptualized as misfitting in a particular built environment, has intensified the spotlight on accessibility for all. Yet tensions remain regarding specific strategies and focuses. Reassembling the puzzle thus remains an ongoing project, one that must remain oriented to being useful to SWDs themselves. We expect, and indeed hope, that our and others' understandings of being teachers of SWDs continue to deepen and shift as we consider the internal tensions, find new concepts that broaden our perception, and engage in further iterations of duoethnographic learning projects.

Part 3:
Reflecting on Classroom Experiments with Duoethnography
Robert J. Lowe & Luke Lawrence

In this section of the paper Robert J. Lowe and Luke Lawrence will reflect on our experiences of using duoethnography as a classroom activity with our students. The students were asked to engage in multiple recorded discussions with a partner on a particular topic. The students then listened back to and thematically coded their discussions before writing them up into fictionalised dialogues (for more details, see part 3 of Lowe & Lawrence, 2020). By encouraging our students to engage in duoethnographies, we hoped for them to develop their speaking skills through peer interaction, and also to develop their listening skills both through interaction with their discussion partner, and through listening back to their recorded discussions at home. In the writing up stage of the duoethnography, students had the chance to

develop their reading and writing skills. Additionally, the project was intended to contribute to positive group dynamics in the classroom, and help develop strong interpersonal relationships between the students through personal interaction (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). In the dialogue that follows, we will discuss how successfully we feel our classroom experiments contributed to the linguistic and interpersonal development of our students.

Rob: I guess the first place to start is with language. In the book, we discuss some of the potential benefits that duoethnographic projects might have on language learning, and I document a few examples of students developing their language skills through peer interaction, both in the discussion and in the collaborative writing of the final piece, something that has been shown to be very effective for language teaching (Storch, 2013). Did you notice any similar development among your students?

Luke: Yeah, definitely. Actually, I hadn't paid much attention to it until I read your chapter about it, but I think it was a big part of the project. In my subsequent classes, I have thought a lot about student pairings and how to maximise this language development aspect of students carrying out a duoethnographic project. I think there are different scenarios, for example a higher level student paired with a less linguistically able one, or choosing two students of a similar level but with different strengths. I guess each type of pairing has its own affordances and drawbacks. Did you find any pros and cons of different pairings of students?

Rob: I did, yeah. The biggest issues I found in pairings were less with linguistic differences and more in terms of personality differences. We'll talk about

this soon, I'm sure, but for students who were a little less comfortable with each other, there was some tension in terms of them correcting or co-constructing language together. Students who got on well were quite willing to intervene in each other's talk and scaffold each other. They were also more willing to express a lack of understanding. As we explain in the book, this kind of scaffolding and co-construction is central to language development based on peer interaction (Philp, et al., 2014), but I found some pairings were more willing to "paper over" gaps in understanding and communication, rather than try to bridge them. What kind of pairings did you find most effective in terms of language development?

Luke: First of all, I think you are completely right. Although we separated the linguistic and the interpersonal in the book, it seems like they are totally bound up with one another. To answer your question though, I found a similar thing. The students that had a more comfortable working relationship seemed to benefit the most in terms of language development as they were more willing to negotiate meaning. Saying that, there was a group of three students that wrote a trioethnography in my class last semester that were all kind of quiet and reserved and not of a particularly high level compared to some other students in the class, but they produced the best duoethnography paper of the whole class. I think they each realised their own strengths and weaknesses and drew on each of them to produce an outcome that was greater than the sum of its parts in terms of the quality of the language and the writing. Can I ask you about the group dynamics aspect now? I'm interested to hear if doing the duoethnographies was helpful in promoting interpersonal relationships

between students and the overall dynamics of the class.

Rob: That's a good question. I think it's difficult to say, because in this particular class most of the students got along ok, and as I already mentioned, one or two of the pairings didn't seem to fully gel, even at the end of the project. For these groups it seemed like the whole thing was just another project, and predictably this produced the least interesting duoethnographies from the class. However, I did notice what seemed to be growing depths of understanding between pairs who were already quite good friends. By doing the duoethnography, they delved into experiences, and their feelings around those experiences, which seemed to surprise and help them get a deeper understanding of each other. This is just from my perspective, of course, but I think they finished the project knowing more about one another and understanding one another better than they did when they started. As for the whole group dynamics, I think there was an effect, but it was somewhat lopsided. The students who were open with each other shared that openness with the class, while the students who were more closed off had less to share. If I did this again, I would make a more conscious effort to address this. It seems like you had a more generally positive response?

Luke: Yeah, maybe. As you know, I put a lot of effort into fostering positive whole group dynamics in all of my classes right from the very first lessons. So, by the time we started the duoethnographies on Week 9 of the course every student already had a good working relationship with every other student in the class. I guess these are things that we could add to our recommendations if we did something similar again; the importance

of selecting the most appropriate research partner for each student and for setting up the right atmosphere in the class for students to have the most effective and meaningful language learning experience possible.

The main takeaway from the above is that a teacher cannot expect the project to do all of the work. While a duoethnography provides opportunities both for language development through peer interaction (Philp, et al., 2014), and for the development of positive group dynamics in the class (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003), these things do not happen automatically. Our reflections suggest that without a concerted effort on the part of the teacher to encourage frank and open communication, and the growth of sincere relationships with other members of the class, the full potential of the projects may not be realized. We see this reflection as an addendum, added with the benefit of hindsight, to our initial classroom experimentation. Looking back, we can see both the strengths of this kind of project and also the necessary role of the teacher in realizing the potential of using duoethnography in the classroom.

Conclusion

In this paper we have introduced the research methodology of duoethnography by giving a definition of the term, outlining how to carry out a duoethnography and showing the uses of it so far in the field of ELT. Following this, Daniel Hooper, and Matthew W. Turner and Nick Kasparek revisited their previously published duoethnographies by providing reflections and responses from their point of view in the present. This was followed finally by another reflection from Robert J. Lowe and Luke Lawrence on classroom experimentation using duoethnography, presented in a

duoethnographic style. The goal of these reflections has been to extend our original discussions and highlight the fact that duoethnographies are not closed systems with defined start and end points. Rather, they present one snapshot of an ongoing reflective process, which is made continually richer with the benefit of time, distance, and personal development. These reflections also do not represent an end point, but simply stand as another link further along the chain of reflection.

The paper has also aimed to show how duoethnography may be used to bridge the gap between research and practice. In Section 1, Daniel Hooper showed how it can be used to foster understanding and respect for teachers' practice. Similarly, in Section 2 Matthew W. Turner and Nick Kasparek's reflections on SWDs can be seen as helpful for practicing teachers with SWDs in their classes. Finally, Section 3 reflected on the successes and failures of using duoethnography as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, thus giving practical ideas and guidance for teachers wishing to use duoethnography in their own classes. In addition, the accessibility of the method makes duoethnography a useful methodology for busy teachers and novice researchers.

We hope that this paper has served as a useful introduction for any teachers and researchers that are new to duoethnography, and who may be thinking of using it as either a research approach for critical pedagogy, a tool for reflective practice, or as a classroom project for their students to engage in. For teachers and researchers already familiar with duoethnography and the use of it in our field, this paper may act as a useful reminder that the published duoethnography should not be understood as the end of a process, but rather as just one more step in an ongoing journey of research or reflection.

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Appendix

Link 1 - Forum: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfy-OZKXCe4

Link 2 - Reflective Q&A session: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpceb7UbpVQ

About the Authors

Robert J. Lowe is an associate professor in the Department of Languages and Culture, Ochanomizu University. His research focuses on critical issues in English language teaching. lowe.robert.james@ocha.ac.jp https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2411-0330

Luke Lawrence is an assistant professor in the College of Commerce at Nihon University. His research interests revolve around critical approaches to identity in English language teaching and learning. lawrence.luke@nihon-u.ac.jp https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7956-5252

Daniel Hooper is an associate professor in the Department of English Communication at Tokyo Kasei University. His research interests are self-access language learning and communities of practice. tywardreathdan@gmail.com https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9431-3195

Matthew W. Turner is a lecturer in the Institute of Arts and Sciences at the Tokyo University of Science. His research interests include language teacher development, podcasting, and reflective practice. turner@rs.tus.ac.jp https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4966-2975

Nick Kasparek is an associate professor in the Department of Social System Design at Eikei University of Hiroshima. His research involves curriculum studies and English language teaching. nick@eikei.ac.jp https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7416-5375