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"Don't wake me, my desk is far too comfortable": an autoethnography of a novice ESL teacher's first year of teaching in Japan

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“DON’T WAKE ME, MY DESK IS FAR TOO COMFORTABLE”:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A NOVICE ESL TEACHER’S FIRST YEAR OF
TEACHING IN JAPAN

A Thesis
Presented To
Eastern Washington University
Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

By
Delaney Holland
Spring 2015

Abstract

This thesis explores and analyzes a first year ESL teacher's experience teaching at an all-girl's private school in Nishinomiya, Japan. Chapter 3 is divided into 15 sections that tell the teacher's story of living and teaching in Japan. This chapter includes description, dialogue, concurrent diary excerpts, photos, and theory. Chapter 4 analyzes these experiences and discusses the lessons the author learned while reflecting on her teaching in Japan. The main lesson learned was the importance of practicing cultural relativity—that is, opening one's mind and realizing that there is more than one way to live, teach, and see the world. Chapter 5 compiles all the theory the author studied while attending graduate school, concluding with what she will bring from both her experiences in Japan and in graduate school into her current ESL classrooms.

Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for helping me complete this project. First of all, I would like to thank my thesis defense committee members. Dr. Reeves was my mentor throughout this project, and I will always be grateful for all of her assistance. Like me, Dr. Reeves also taught in Japan, so our conversations were very sweet and nostalgic as we remembered our times in Japan fondly. Dr. Reeves always asked me questions to get me thinking of my experiences in different ways, and thanks to her, I was able to open my mind and see more perspectives as I reflected. She pushed me to make this the best project it could be, and I am very grateful for her commitment to this thesis.

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Mary Parker was the third member of my thesis committee, and I am extremely grateful that she agreed to join this project. She currently teaches Japanese students, so she gave me a lot of useful feedback and insight during the defense. She also encouraged me, telling me that this was one of the most interesting theses she has ever read. I cannot thank Mary enough for taking the time to read my thesis and give me such positive feedback.

I would also like to thank Kaho Hamada, my Japanese friend who helped check the spelling of my Japanese throughout this thesis. Kaho was a student at Mukogawa Women's University: Junior High and High School (Muko-jo) in Japan while I taught

there. Then Kaho came to Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute (MFWI) and was in my group while I was an R.A. Now, Kaho is a student at Eastern Washington University (EWU) where I teach. So Kaho and I have known each other very well for many years. She was a great help in completing this thesis.

A very big thank you is in order for all my colleagues and students at Muko-jo. Everyone at Muko-jo treated me with such grace and love. I felt very cherished as a teacher at Muko-jo, and I will always think of every colleague and student with a happy heart and a sincere smile.

I would also like to thank all my students from MFWI who served as my cultural brokers while I lived in Japan. They took me under their wings and showed me their country. Without their love, I might not have been as strong during my year in Japan.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their continual support and for constantly pushing me to be a strong, independent woman. Without my parents' pushing, I probably never would have gone to Japan in the first place and never would have written this thesis.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents who sustained me during my year in Japan.

Preface

Language Learning Experience: Japanese

“*Doko desu ka?* どこですか”

“*Core wa nani?* これはなに”

“*Ah! Kawaii, kawaii!* あ！かわいい、かわいい”

It was September 2007, and I was sitting on my bed in my dorm room at Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute (MFWI)—a foreign exchange program in Spokane, Washington for female students from Mukogawa Women’s University in Nishinomiya, Japan. I had recently become a resident assistant (R.A.) and had been assigned a group of thirteen friendly and talkative Japanese students.

As I sat on my bed, I listened to their chatter, straining to catch some of the words and hopefully piece together some understanding. I realized I wanted to know what they were saying—sharing a language and communicating is what makes me feel close to people, and I wanted to build a stronger relationship with my group of students.

I remember sitting on my bed with my notebook and writing down different phrases I was hearing, planning to ask them later what the words meant. After a few minutes, one of the girls came into my room to ask me where the vacuum was. I answered her and then seized the opportunity to learn some of her language. Pointing to the phrases in my notebook, I asked her what they each meant. And so began my introduction to learning the Japanese language.

At first, different students would come to my room each evening and teach me a couple phrases in Japanese. I would find every opportunity to use the phrases I was learning in our day-to-day campus life.

I became known on campus for my pet-phrase, “*Omoroina!* おもしろいな” (Kansai-ben for ‘funny!’). My other favorite phrase was, “*Joudanyade!* じょうだんやで” (Kansai-ben for ‘I’m just joking!’).

Soon, my nightly lessons weren’t enough, and I decided to enroll in an actual Japanese class at EWU. In my Japanese classes, I found that writing was the most difficult for me, which was an interesting phenomenon because in English, writing has always been my strong suit. This made me realize that ESL/EFL students might be strong writers in their native language, and their writing in English might not accurately reflect who they are as a writer. Being aware of this has helped me to be more of a compassionate advocate and teacher to my ELL’s.

Language Teaching Experience: Nishinomiya, Japan

In June 2011, after studying for five years at Eastern Washington University (EWU) and being an R.A. at MFWI for four of those years, I graduated with my BA in Secondary Education and English, and a minor in Japanese. In the midst of student teaching at Mt. Spokane High School during my final quarter at EWU, I was also busy applying for a teaching position in Japan. The job was offered to me, and two months after graduating, I moved to Nishinomiya, Japan to teach English at Mukogawa Women’s University: Junior High and High School.

This thesis, particularly chapter 3, details my experiences teaching English in Japan.

MATESL Program at Eastern Washington University

After returning to the states, I decided to travel for a bit and spent a few months exploring Europe. After my travels, I began working as an R.A. at MFWI once again. Living with Japanese students this second time around, I felt like I had so much more insight into their culture. I decided to apply to the MATESL Program at EWU in order to become better equipped to work with ESL students. As you will see later in this thesis, the MATESL program has greatly impacted both my teaching philosophy and my teaching methods. Thanks to this program, I am certainly much more empathetic to my students and their needs as ELL's.

Language Teaching Experience: Cheney, Washington

My first language teaching experience at EWU was interning in English 112: Composition for Multilingual Students. In this class, I was able to lead and write weekly journal prompts with ESL students. I also had my own small group of students with whom I held writing conferences weekly. In this course, I also had the opportunity to teach the whole class a few times, and I developed curriculum for teaching writing to ESL students.

Currently, I teach in the English Language Institute (ELI) at EWU, and I am constantly trying to remember how I felt and what I was thinking when I was sitting in my own Japanese classes. As of now, my students are from Saudi Arabia, so I often ask

them to teach me a phrase or two in Arabic. My goodness is that difficult! I like to do this to remind myself how difficult it is to learn a different language, and also to remind my students how far they have come—they can speak my language, but I cannot speak theirs. I always tell them to be proud of their English ability.

Unfortunately, I didn't have all of this empathy and understanding when I went to teach English in Japan. I was young and naïve, and I expected my students to conform to my America-centric view of teaching and learning English.

The following thesis details the joys and the challenges I faced while teaching in Japan and concludes with what I have learned since joining the MATESL program and reflecting back on my experiences via autoethnography.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Clad in brand new “slippers” (a pair of silver “Cros” to be worn *only* on school property), I slid open the wooden door, and thirty-two eager faces stared back at me. They were seated in rows made up of individual wooden desks that faced the front of the classroom, which was elevated on a wooden stage with a podium, projector screen, and blackboard. All the middle school girls were wearing identical calf-length navy blue skirts with white shirts tucked neatly under their navy blue sweaters. Smiling, I walked up to the front of the room and mustered out, “Good morning, my name is Miss Holland.” I was about to give a brief introduction of myself when a girl with short black cropped hair suddenly stood up and shouted, “Attention!” Then all thirty-two Japanese girls stood up. The leader shouted, “Bow!” And they all bowed in unison, then sat back down. I stood there dumbfounded for a moment. No one had warned me about the all-class bow, and I was a bit taken aback.

So why am I telling my story? Many TESL scholars testify to the value of language teachers reflecting on their experiences and sharing their stories. Reeves (2012) speaks of “...the value of telling our stories to one another and to our students” (p. 1). In the same vein as Reeves, Bell writes in her article “Narrative Inquiry: More Than Just Telling Stories”:

Narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures. That is, we select those elements of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect the stories available to us.

(2002, p. 207)

In other words, writing our experiences in story form helps us understand our experiences more deeply. I am writing my story in order to come to a deeper understanding of my experiences in Japan. Rappel (2014) also explains the value in narrative:

In effect, narrative approaches to teaching and learning encourage educators as well as learners to question the origins of their own understandings and readjust value judgements and attitudes within learning environments. Reflection on personal and collective experience facilitates intercultural sensitivity in language learning through an increased understanding of individual and group behaviour.
(p. 15)

It benefits both the teachers and the learners to reflect on and analyze prior experiences. Narrative, in particular, helps us to have intercultural sensitivity.

Johnson (2006) also comments on the use of narrative as a means to understanding language teachers:

Because this enterprise takes an emic perspective, in that it seeks to capture the meanings and perspectives of teachers and their learning, the use of narrative has emerged as a predominant means of understanding and documenting teachers' ways of knowing. (p. 242)

In postmodern research methods, the author's voice is highly valued (Slattery, 2006). In the present study, student voices, teacher voices, and material culture are included intentionally to capture the multivocality of the postmodern research method.

This thesis is an autoethnography detailing my year of living and teaching in Japan. Before teachers read this sizeable story, it is important that they understand autoethnography.

Autoethnography, a form of narrative inquiry, has become a popular method of research in the TESL field in recent years. According to Simon-Maeda (2004), “TESOL researchers are increasingly recognizing narrative inquiry as a viable strategy for investigating how students experience language learning (e.g., Bell, 2002; Harklau, 2000; Kanno, 2000; Pavlenko, 1998) and how teachers construct their professional identities (e.g., Casanave & Schechter, 1997; Freeman, 1996; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Johnston, 1997)” (p. 407). Further, TESOL advises ethnographers to “indicate the social implications of the cultural description...and the social usefulness of the research and the ways it addresses issues of social justice, human development, and ethical integrity” (TESOL.org, 2015). The focus of this autoethnography is more on human development—both my students’ and my own. In this autoethnography, I aimed to follow Canagarajah’s (2012) model of analytical autethnography: reflecting upon and analyzing my experiences.

To begin reflecting on these experiences, I will provide some background on my teaching situation in Japan. At Mukogawa Women’s University: Junior High and High School (Muko-jo) in Nishinomiya, Japan, I had been assigned eleven sections of 8th grade English—eight of which were called “Intelligent English” (IE) and two of which were called “Super English” (SE). Each class averaged from about 30 to 36 students. I taught in each IE course for a couple hours once a week, and I taught in the SE courses for one hour daily.

It was August, and the girls had already been together as a class since April—when the Japanese school year begins. I had graduated from EWU in June 2011 with a BA in English and Secondary Education, then moved to Japan in August 2011, so I was a fresh young college grad, coming late into their world.

At Muko-jo, teachers did not have their own classrooms. Teachers moved from class to class, and the students as cohorts each had their own classrooms. It is important to note that these were *their* classrooms, and the teachers entered *their* space. The girls were in charge of cleaning their classrooms, making tea, and they even ate their lunches in their respective classrooms. In fact, every Monday, their Japanese teachers assigned each student a new classroom chore for the week. This room was their own sacred space, and as a teacher, not only was I an outsider due to the fact that I was American, I was also an outsider entering into their space.

As a sort of double-outsider, it was that much more rewarding when students went out of their way to make me feel welcome. Within the first few weeks of my arrival, my office desk was covered in sweet welcome notes, and I had many visitors come during the lunch hour, eager to get to know me. I will discuss this more in Chapter 3, section eight—“Material Culture”.

Even though I had been a resident assistant (R.A.) at Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute (MFWI) for Japanese students in Spokane, Washington for four years, I was still not accustomed for everything I was about to encounter in Japan.

One particular cultural expectation that was new to me was the manner in which I was expected to enter the school grounds. Every time I entered and left the school gates, I

was expected to get off my bike and bow at the school. *Every time*. Soon this became second hat, but it certainly took some getting used to.

Another cultural expectation which I had not been prepared for was I had to change my shoes whenever I entered the school grounds. There was an official office full of lockers for teachers where we stored our slippers to be used at school. Even when we went on lunch breaks, we had to change our shoes every time we left campus. This also took some getting used to, but eventually became a habit for me. As this thesis progresses, you will discover in more depth many of the unwritten cultural rules to which I had to adjust during my stay in Japan.

TESOL calls for ethnographers to disclose their backgrounds prior to unfolding their research, so I will briefly provide mine. I went to “The Oaks: A Classical Christian Academy” (The Oaks), a small private school from 7th to 12th grade. My mother taught first grade there, and that is the reason I was able to attend, or else we wouldn’t have been able to afford it. In some ways, I was following in my mother’s footsteps when I decided to become a teacher myself. My experience at The Oaks also helped me adjust to my experience in Japan. It was a private school, and there were more girls than boys in my school, which turned out to be similar to the school I ended up teaching at in Japan.

In fact, to demonstrate the similarities in our two schools, I will post the mission statements of each. The Oaks’ vision statement is extremely lengthy, so I will just post an excerpt here, but to view the full mission statement, please see my references.

The Oaks Vision Statement:

We aim to graduate young men and women who think clearly and listen carefully with discernment and understanding; who reason persuasively and articulate precisely; who

are capable of evaluating their entire range of experience in the light of the Scriptures; and who do so with eagerness in joyful submission to God. We desire them to recognize cultural influences as distinct from biblical, and to be unswayed towards evil by the former. We aim to find them well-prepared in all situations, possessing both information and the knowledge of how to use it. We desire they be socially graceful and spiritually gracious; equipped with and understanding the tools of learning; desiring to grow in understanding, yet fully realizing the limitations and foolishness of the wisdom of this world. We desire they have a heart for the lost and the courage to seek to dissuade those who are stumbling towards destruction; that they distinguish real religion from religion in form only; and that they possess the former, knowing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ. And all these we desire them to possess with humility and gratitude to God. (The Oaks, 2015)

Muko-jo Mission Statement:

True intelligence to continuously pursue truth

To be active as leading members in society, we are required to possess intelligence. What is intelligence? It could be called the spirit of loving truth. Seek a task, think of it, and create a new opinion by yourself. We educate women to possess self-reliant attitudes and positive outlooks towards learning and seeking wisdom, and to develop the ability to think in order to continuously pursue the truth.

Sensitive and broad mind

To sense beauty when seeing flowers; to appreciate and be impressed by works of art: it is important to have great sensitivity in our modern society, which is fraught with tension. A graceful mind that loves beauty and gives pleasure and serenity to the human soul

enriches our lives. Our university declares an educational policy to nurture “women to have great sensitivity and broadmindedness” and carries out education that emphasizes this ideal.

Spirit of consideration of and dedication to others

You are one member of society, as are other people. To maintain good human relations in any social group, it is important to consider not only yourself but also others and to have a sense of philanthropy. We educate women to be able to distinguish right from wrong, to have good morals, and to be able to consider things from other people's points of view.

(Mukogawa Women’s University, 2015)

Notice that both mission statements emphasize an importance of possessing intelligence, seeking out truth, being socially graceful, and considering the needs of others.

It is important to note that I had a similar upbringing to my students in Japan, because my experience could have been very different if I had come from a dissimilar background.

Statement of the Problem

Novice English teachers often arrive in foreign countries not knowing what to expect and not feeling equipped for cultural and pedagogical accommodation in the classroom, despite prior exposure to the local language and customs. Some of these teachers, without adequate support and guidance, become discouraged and may feel unable to complete their contracts, leaving the country without resolving the cultural and

pedagogical conflicts that have arisen. To this end, our international professional organization, TESOL, this year called for a special issue of ESL teachers' narratives about their first years of teaching, so that readers will understand different obstacles that new teachers have faced and overcome.

Purpose

The purpose of this autoethnography is to

- 1) reflect on my first year of teaching immediately upon completion of the Bachelor of Arts in English with an emphasis in Secondary Education and a minor in Japanese;
- 2) inform novice EFL teachers of issues they might encounter as they teach English in an all girls' private middle and high school in the Kansai area in Japan; and
- 3) shape my language teaching philosophy as I complete the master's program in Teaching English as a Second Language.

Assumptions

Having freshly graduated with a B.A. in Secondary Education and English and having spent my final quarter at EWU student teaching several different courses at Mt. Spokane High School, I assumed I was adequately prepared to teach middle and high school English almost anywhere. TESOL requires researchers to disclose their assumptions about their case study and the culture they are entering, particularly in ethnographic work. It is also advised that teachers indicate if their view is etic or emic in their reporting, and this may change throughout the research process. We are expected to provide information about our own background and prior experiences with the culture

that might influence our perspectives. Finally, we are also cautioned not to essentialize cultures or generalize from the specific case to the entire culture in our discussion of findings (TESOL 2015).

The following were my assumptions prior to arriving in Japan to teach middle and high school girls in the private school, Mukogawa Women's University: Junior High and High School:

- 1) Because I had been well prepared to teach English in secondary schools in the United States, I was well prepared to teach outside of the United States as well.
- 2) Because I had lived with Japanese women who were undergraduate students from Mukogawa Women's University in Spokane for four years, I knew the culture well and did not expect many surprises.
- 3) Because I was 22 and had lived away from home for four years, I would not experience homesickness in Japan.
- 4) Because I was a new and inexperienced teacher, I would be mentored both formally and informally by the other Japanese teachers as is often the case in the United States.
- 5) Because I have always been an optimist and have seen the glass half full, I had a reserve of resilience that would sustain me, despite any challenges or hardships that came my way.
- 6) Because I had been told by colleagues at Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute (MFWI) in Spokane that the students would be quiet and reserved in class in Japan, I assumed I would have to pull them out of their shells and create learning activities that would help them communicate in English.

- 7) Because of the long hours stated in the contract I would be working on school work and preparation almost around the clock, and I would have little time to get out into the community, meet Japanese people, and see the culture outside the classroom.
- 8) Because of media influence, I assumed that Japan would be mostly urban with high-density population and very little nature.

Research Questions

- 1) What was it like to be a novice English teacher in a private junior/senior high school for girls in Japan?
- 2) What strengths did I bring to the classroom?
- 3) What were challenges—both cultural and pedagogical—that I faced?
- 4) What are some cultural issues that may have affected my teaching in Japan?
- 5) What did I learn and how did I change from this experience teaching in Japan?
- 6) What have I learned from teaching in Japan that other teachers or novice ESL teachers might benefit from learning?

Research Methods

This thesis is mixed methods. It is qualitative and reflective in nature. It incorporates autoethnography, ethnography, and elements of concurrent diary study. It also contains some elements of reflective participant-action research.

Thesis Overview

This thesis contains four more chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature showing (1) the value of autoethnography; (2) the importance of understanding culture and identity; and (3) Japanese culture in the classroom. Chapter 3 is the research methodology, data collection, and analysis of the findings—that is; my autoethnography. Chapter 4 is reflections on the autoethnography with a focus on frustrations, joys, and cultural gaps. It also includes a discussion of my initial assumptions and answers to the research questions. Chapter 5 examines what I have learned since returning to the states and attending grad school. The thesis concludes with my final thoughts to impart to a novice EFL teacher in Japan.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“Further, by finding out as much as possible and forming accurate impressions of other cultures, one can reduce anxiety and negative expectations” (Neuberg cited in Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994, p. 89).

This chapter is a review of the literature showing (1) the value of autoethnography; (2) the importance of understanding culture and identity; and (3) Japanese culture in the classroom.

I. The Value of autoethnography

In order to understand exactly what autoethnography entails, one must first understand ethnography, the in-depth study of a culture—its relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences. The purpose of ethnography is to help both insiders and outsiders better understand a culture. Ethnographers act as participant observers, taking notes of cultural happenings, then analyzing these observations (Ellis, 2011, para. 7).

The difference between ethnography and autoethnography, therefore, is that tiny word “auto”. Auto, as we know from the Greek roots, means “self”. So an autoethnography is an ethnography in which the ethnographer examines her *own* cultural experiences.

Now the question remains—what is the difference between autoethnography and autobiography? Autobiography is merely a retelling of one’s experiences, whereas autoethnography seeks to analyze those experiences within a theoretical framework. As Ellis (2011) states, autoethnography requires “comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research” (para. 9). In other words, autoethnography goes beyond simply reflecting on experiences and instead weaves these experiences into a theoretical framework that includes the voices and perspectives of other authors. In Ellis’ words, “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (para. 1). In other words, it is through the autoethnographer’s lens that readers can witness a culture up close.

There is an inherent value in looking back and analyzing one’s experiences. Trahar (2009) states: “it is often only retrospectively that we come to understand and give meaning to events” (para. 3). Often, we don’t realize the meaning behind our day-to-day experiences, and it is only when we reflect upon these experiences that we understand what they mean (Ryan, 2012).

So it is clear what autoethnography is, and it is clear that it has the benefit of helping both the autoethnographer and the insiders and outsiders of a culture better understand that culture.

Some might argue that autoethnography is not valid because the researcher, being a participant observer, might be too biased to write objectively about her own experiences. Along these lines, others might argue that the researcher’s memories are not valid research as they might not be accurate or dependable memories. Can one depend on

memories as a legitimate form of research? For this reason, some qualitative research combines a concurrent diary study with autoethnography to document the writer's frame of mind during the experience living in the culture.

Autoethnography is valued research in that it openly states the researcher's assumptions, and this is required by TESL (the international professional organization of ESL teachers). Unlike quantitative research, which is assumed to be unbiased, autoethnography acknowledges its subjectivity and is "self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value-free" (Ellis, 2011, para. 3). Simply because autoethnography depends on stories rather than theories, people assume that it might not be accurate. In actuality, autoethnography recognizes its possible biases, whereas other disciplines, such as the sciences, often do not recognize biases that might actually exist. As Ellis states, "autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (para. 3).

Autoethnographers are self-aware of their biases and openly disclose these biases, acknowledging that there is more than one way of thinking, writing, speaking, and believing. The whole purpose of an autoethnography is to examine in-depth the underlying beliefs, values, modes of thought, and behaviors of a culture, and in so doing, it "opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research" (Ellis, 2011, para. 4). In that sense, autoethnography widens the definition of what can be considered valid research.

Refining one's definition of what constitutes valid research requires reexamining one's way of thinking about writing and all things academic. In the article "Meaning and

Development of Academic Literacy in a Second Language”, Leki (2008) points out that being “literate” varies from culture to culture. In America, we consider academic literacy as being able to think critically and defend one’s beliefs in writing, using clear logic. Other cultures define academic literacy very differently. As Leki points out, one aspect to being academically literate in Chinese is “having knowledge of thousands of characters and enough familiarity with the works of writers of antiquity to be able to quote them without hesitation in certain contexts” (p. 330). Clearly, this concept of academic literacy is often not what we consider academic literacy in English, yet it is very valid in Chinese. The same goes for other cultures. In Japan, for example, an academically literate writer will only hint at the message and leave it up to the reader to determine meaning, whereas in America, it is the writer’s responsibility to clearly convey the meaning and the message of the text (Leki, 2008, p. 335).

Leki calls it an arrogance to believe that “because at this moment in time we feel that a critical approach works well for us, we must require it of every student that comes our way, not as an option but as the only appropriate form of intellectual engagement” (p. 336). She continues this train of thought, arguing that just because we in America have a cultural bias towards critical thinking and privilege it, does not mean we should expect nor require our ESL students to have this same inclination.

Though Leki’s argument is focused specifically on teaching writing to ESL students, it can apply to the question of whether or not autoethnography is a valid form of research by showing how our own view of research is itself biased. Autoethnography seeks to break down these cultural barriers and enlighten both insiders and outsiders of different ways of thinking, behaving, and believing.

By definition, autoethnography examines personal experiences, analyzes them within a theoretical framework, and then shows what can be learned from these experiences. The question now, instead of whether or not autoethnography is valid, should be: what is the *value* in autoethnography?

The biggest value to autoethnography is that it allows one's personal experiences to benefit others, rather than just the person who experienced the culture. As Ellis (2011) states:

Thus, the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; Hooks, 1994). (para. 14)

By sharing our experiences with others, we make awareness and change possible. In the same vein, I want my experiences in Japan to benefit others who plan to teach in Japan.

Along with benefiting others by reaching larger audiences, autoethnography has great value in its ability to act as a tool to help combat feelings of exclusion, cultural loss, and identity crisis that people might face when living in a culture different from their own (Okabe, 2008; Sykes 2014). When a person feeling an identity crisis reads the story of another person who also experienced an identity crisis, the reader will realize she is not alone. She can also learn from the writer's experiences how to overcome her own struggles and challenges as Okabe did in her case study of anomie.

In addition to helping others, autoethnography is valuable in that it gives meaning to one's experiences. Sykes (2014) writes about how autoethnography allows the writer to learn from his experiences. He calls this "transformative learning" and says that it "seeks to understand the qualitative changes a person undergoes in learning...[and] requires critical reflection and the maturity to recognize the concept of self is being altered" (p. 5). When I write an autoethnography on my year in Japan, I am not only allowing my experience to benefit others, but also learning from my experience via deep analysis. I am analyzing and discovering both what the experience taught me about Japanese culture and what it taught me about my identity and my own culture. As Sykes states: "Autoethnography is recognized as a vehicle to promote transformational learning (Boyd, 2008; Glowacki-Dudka, Tref, & Usman, 2005) and cultural identity (Boyd, 2008)" (p. 4). In fact, recent autoethnographers attest to their personal transformation through lived experience in other cultures (Herman, 2010; Lee, 2013; Okabe, 2008; Ryan, 2012).

II. Culture and Identity

Examining one's culture and identity in depth can help both the autoethnographer and the readers of the autoethnography to learn from the experiences and overcome struggles.

A major problem many EFL teachers experience is culture shock—when their identity and personal culture clashes with the new culture in which they are living. In their article "Culture Shock", McEnery and DesHarnais (1990) examined culture shock from a business standpoint. Through quantitative research examining the success rates of

expatriates working internationally, McEnery and DesHarnais found that it is more cost-effective and beneficial in the long run to train and prep employees about the culture in which they will be working. They found that “fewer than one-third of expatriate failures are considered job-related” (p. 45). Instead, people returned to their native countries because of cultural misunderstandings and setbacks.

McEnery and DesHarnais state: “Culture is a set of social norms and responses that conditions the behavior of a group of people. The professional who works internationally must consider not only the job and the organization, but the culture as well” (p. 44). And considering the culture does *not* mean simply learning that country’s language. It means learning the value system, belief system, ways of thinking, behaviors, and practices of another culture. As McEnery and DesHarnais say, “Even if you do know the language, it may not be enough. If you do not understand the culture, you may not appreciate the messages behind the words” (p. 44). If it is essential for international business employees to understand the culture in which they will work, it follows that it is also essential for EFL teachers to understand the culture in which they will teach. Indeed, Duff & Uchida (1997) state: “Cultural awareness and understanding are essential for language teachers” (p. 476). And for this reason, it behooves language teachers to read other teachers’ stories.

In the thesis titled “Journaling to Give Voice to ESL Writers: A Curriculum on *Maya Angelou: More Than a Poet*,” former EWU student McGinn (2005) examines the loss of identity that ESL students face when coming to America. McGinn states: “ESL students, who cannot fully, verbally engage the surrounding culture, become students with personal identities hidden beneath a surface” (p. 16). These students who are

unfamiliar with the new culture in which they are trying to live and study can feel a bit “lost in translation” so to speak. Though McGinn is speaking of ESL students, her statement can apply to anyone trying to function in a culture different from their own. In our case, this statement applies equally to EFL teachers in Japan—if we cannot understand and engage in the culture, we will feel lost.

Another former EWU student, Herman (2010), wrote a thesis based on his experience teaching in China, and how his lack of cultural competence led to his struggles trying to teach in a culture very different from his own. He states: “I found a great disconnect between my students and me, and I had no idea what the cause was or what the best solution would be” (p. x). Through writing this autethnography, Herman came to greater understanding of both himself and his students.

It is clear that EFL teachers should understand the culture in which they are going to teach, but unfortunately, many EFL teachers go into a new country unaware of its unwritten rules and values. As Simon-Maeda (2004) reveals, “Teacher training has traditionally emphasized instructional methods and proficiency measures while ignoring the realities of teachers’ lives both inside and outside of the classroom (p. 406). And this is rather regrettable as many EFL teachers struggle to match their identity to the new culture in which they are teaching. Duff and Uchida (1997) speak of “blended identities even blurred identities” (p. 452) that EFL teachers often experience when adjusting to a new culture.

Feeling lost and having difficulty adjusting one’s identity to a new culture can lead to culture shock as well as a lack of self-confidence (Okabe, 2008). Simon-Maeda (2004) shares the words of an EFL teacher in Japan:

My whole master's thesis was trying to come to grips with my own identity in Japan, and my whole identity in Japan, trying to be a professional is that I feel like a fake because I don't have the...here you're getting the self-confidence stuff, boy you've got one big lack of it *right* here (p. 416).

I hope that my autoethnography can prevent future EFL and ESL teachers from experiencing this culture shock and loss of confidence.

III. Japanese Culture in the Classroom

“The Japanese proverb *chimmoku wa kin, yuben wa gin* (eloquence is silver, silence is gold) means that an unexpressed feeling is closer to the truth and therefore more refined”

(Alexander, 2010, p. 70).

Having examined the benefits of autoethnography and determined the importance of understanding the culture in which one lives and works, let us take a closer look at Japanese culture in the classroom. After all, Japan was the culture in which I lived and taught, so it behooves us to study Japanese culture in more depth. Before we analyze Japanese culture in the classroom, it would be beneficial to examine deep-rooted Japanese values that more than likely will transfer over to the classroom.

Ryback (2001) studied Japanese psychology, questioning whether Japanese and Western psychologies can conform to each other. Throughout his article, Ryback continually mentions the Japanese value of inner privacy: “The Japanese sense of inner privacy is inscrutable. Although emotional problems are as great for the Japanese as for any other culture, the Japanese person is not likely to take initiative in seeking help”

(2011, p. 129). The Japanese have this stoic mindset that they should keep their problems in, and not burden others. Along these lines, Ryback states: “Personal boundaries do not break down easily for the Japanese” (p. 13). So we cannot expect our Japanese students to readily express their thoughts and emotions in the classroom.

In addition, we know that “Japan is a collectivist society; individuals are encouraged to conform to the standards of others and be a part of the group” (Chesky, 2013, p. 87). So in concurrence with keeping their problems or feelings in, Japanese also prefer to live in harmony and not be that proverbial nail that sticks out and will be hammered down.

Along with privacy and collectivism, “Japanese society has a very strong hierarchical structure deeply embedded in its history, from the feudal Shoguns who lived in heavily fortified castles hard won in military conflict, to the more contemporary time...” (Ryback, 2011, p. 129). Japanese have a great respect for authority and those who are older or more experienced. In fact, they even have a *senpai-kohai* system in which the *senpai* is the older, more experienced leader who takes care of everything, and the *kohai* is the younger, less experienced follower who does what she is asked (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994).

Finally, and *very* important to note, “tradition is very strong in Japanese culture” (Ryback, 2001, p. 127). While there may be subtle changes in the culture, they may not be readily recognized by outsiders. As Ryback states, “Western leadership experts have touted the concept of “thinking outside the box”. In Japan, it may be wise to respect the inscrutable inner soul” (p. 134). In other words, what works here in America might not work as well in Japan.

So let us keep all this psychological and cultural knowledge in mind as we examine Japanese behavior in the EFL classroom.

Several studies have shown that in EFL classes in Japan there is often a mismatch between teacher expectations and student expectations (Cogan, 1995, 1996; Hadley & Evans, 2001; Sato, 1990; Stern, 1992, as cited in Saito, 2011). EFL teachers often criticize their Japanese students as “being passive, lacking initiative, and rarely volunteering answers” (Saito, 2004, p. 111). Cummings (2004) also notes: “Much has been written about intercultural clashes between Western teachers and their Japanese students, with students being described as silent, unmotivated, and hostile, and teachers as overeager to impose their values” (p. 26). Murata (2011) concurs: “Japanese students are often described as being reticent, less responsive, unwilling to give opinions or contribute to class...they have been characterized as not having opinions at all or as not being interested in what is going on in class in an English language learning situation (p. 7). EFL teachers tend to equate these behaviors with a lack of motivation, when instead they are often culturally based behaviors. Many EFL teachers go into a new country thinking they will impose their own culture on the students they are about to teach, rather than recognizing that there is more than one way of teaching and learning.

On the reverse side, many Japanese students complain about their EFL teachers’ behaviors and expectations: “A common complaint is that the teachers impose uncomfortable practices such as soliciting original ideas through active verbal participation in class” (Call, 1998; Nelson, 1995; Reid, 1998, as cited in Saito, 2011, p. 111).

The problem here is a lack of cultural understanding on both sides. The EFL teachers go into the classroom believing that student participation is necessary to learning, while the students go into the classroom expecting to only listen to the teacher's lecture. As stated in Saito (2011): "The basic instructional pattern of Japanese education can be described essentially one-way with the teacher presenting information while the students receive and memorize it" (Cogan, 1995; Oxford, Holloway, & Horton-Murillo, 1992; Rockelman, 1995, as cited in Saito, 2011, pp. 112-113). Indeed, as you will see in my autethnography, I had to transition my students from this one-way method of teaching.

Several researchers have studied the different rules of communication between Japanese and North Americans:

While being direct and assertive is valued in North America (Barlund, 1989), Japanese culture emphasizes the value of indirect speech (Clancy, 1989; Hall, 1990). Japanese are taught not to make direct demands or rejections and not to challenge classmates or teachers, in order to preserve "face" (Okabe, 1987). (as cited in Saito, 2011)

So what is perceived as reticence to North American teachers is really just proper communication to Japanese students. We North Americans tend to prefer question and answer, getting students to think outside the box and come up with their own original ideas, but in Japan, "open and negative expressions to teachers are avoided" (Nakane, 1984, as cited in Saito, 2011, p. 112). As EFL teachers, it is important to remember that our concept of critical thinking is culturally bound. As Leki (2008) points out, in America there is a heavy bias toward individualism, so we encourage our students to disclose their

personal opinions. However, “not all cultures encourage young people to self-disclose in classrooms” (p. 337). It appears that by not asking our students their personal opinions in class, we are showing respect by helping them save face because in Japan, publicly disagreeing can be very uncomfortable for all.

Tomizawa (1990) found that Japanese students have a perfectionist nature (as cited in Saito, 2011). Along with this desire to perform perfectly, Japanese students have an interesting combination of both a fear of making mistakes and a fear of outperforming others (Nozaki, 1993; Yuen, 1996, as cited in Saito, 2011). In other words, there are two major reasons why Japanese students have a tendency to not participate in class: 1) they want to perform perfectly and are afraid to make any mistakes, and 2) they do not want to outdo their classmates and be that proverbial nail that sticks out.

Cummings (2004) likewise found her Japanese students afraid to participate and afraid to make mistakes:

Even when I ask them to, they cannot turn away from the front of the classroom to face each other, as if their heads were locked in place, like cows in stanchions. “Turn your heads,” I tell them, smiling. “Turn toward the person next to you.” It is as if they were made of glass and their necks would snap. “Say hello,” I tell them. Then say, “Listen to this,” and read your freewriting aloud. They shudder. I may as well have told them to take a giant pair of pliers and start pulling out their own teeth. (p. 25).

Murata (2011) also found that Japanese students have a tendency to avoid participating in class and speaks of “difficulties students may experience in giving opinions in class...Japanese students stating that they have difficulties even in their mother tongue

situations” (p. 6). This shows that the lack of participation has less to do with English ability and more to do with deep-rooted cultural values about classroom behavior. One student even said, “I don’t ask questions or give opinions during class, because I might inconvenience other students by delaying the lesson in doing so” (p. 6). This shows the enculturation of young Japanese to not offend or disturb others.

Along the lines of not wanting to inconvenience others, Ryback (2011) demonstrates this fear that Japanese students have of being that proverbial nail that sticks out: “Within this strong cultural value of strict adherence to hierarchy emerges a very different value system of shared togetherness...tight-knit groups...the Japanese classroom in which no one dare stand out” (p. 129). Gudykunst and Nishida’s (1994) research concurs: “Children in Japan are taught not to call attention to themselves or take the initiative verbally. Rather, they are taught to foster *enryo*, ritualized verbal self-depreciation used to maintain group harmony” (p. 29). Again, they do not want to be the “nail that sticks out” from the rest of the group. For this reason, praise is used with great caution, for fear of slighting other members of the community.

So when we EFL teachers see our students not participating in our classes, instead of assuming that they are silent because they are unmotivated or they do not care, we should realize that they are likely silent because they do not want to make a mistake, be embarrassed, or appear to know more than others.

King (2013) studied silence in the Japanese classrooms quantitatively, disclosing: “Students were found to be responsible for less than one percent of initiated talk within their classes” (p. 325). King’s research concurs with the other research, finding that the Japanese have “a proclivity towards silent, implicit, and non-direct forms of

communication” (Lebra, 1987; Clancy, 1990; McDaniel, 2003, as cited in King, 2013, p. 326).

But what King adds to the research are some actual considerations of silence itself. King explains, “Silence certainly can provide learners space for cognitive processing and thus act as ‘a facilitative device enabling students to gain access, organize and absorb new material’” (p. 327). In other words, silence might just be the process time it takes for the students to grasp the lesson.

In addition, many Westerners tend to view silence as passivity, King (2013) notes that silence can be an active state. He speaks of student choice in not speaking: “Indeed, students may *choose* not to speak for any number of reasons” (p. 328). In the same vein, Gudykunst & Nishida (1994) cite Miyanaga (1991) who found that “to the Japanese, to be quiet and to listen is active, not passive” (p. 76). Instead of seeing silence as passive, we should recognize that their silence is an active choice, or perhaps an attempt to alleviate them from any anxiety they might have with speaking. Indeed, Gudykunst & Nishida (1994) found that “Japanese and Koreans report higher levels of social anxiety than North Americans” (p. 75). Remaining silent might just be one way to cope with any social anxiety. Another possibility for their silence could be that they value their privacy more than we Westerners tend to. Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) state: “Japanese are more likely to use lack of attentiveness as a privacy control mechanism than North Americans” (p. 72). In other words, in order to protect their privacy, Japanese might attempt to appear less attentive than they really are.

Several researchers suggested that there are entitlement issues with Japanese students such as receiving a passing grade no matter the effort or sleeping in class. Saito

(2011) writes: “EFL students also preferred not doing homework assignments, if possible, and expected to receive a passing grade for merely attending classes” (p. 117). And King (2013) speaks of “such popular student activities as sleeping...” (p. 331). Then he later mentions “the great emphasis placed on attendance as the primary means of passing university courses in Japan” (Clayton, 1993; McVeigh, 2002, as cited in King, 2013, p. 333). In other words, performance has little to do with the grade; physical presence is the key to passing a class. To Westerners, the Japanese students may seem a bit entitled in this regard.

Cummings (2004) speaks of the great contrast in the difficulty of passing an entrance exam to get into a university, with the lack of difficulty once students have entered a university: “Teachers are expected to pass their students, and if they don’t, they are blamed for their students’ failure” (p. 25). Again, if the students show up and attend the class, we are expected to pass them.

Chesky (2013), when speaking of current issues in the Japanese school system, talks of “a need for a new subject area that specifically fosters students’ critical thinking and social competence” (p. 88) This critical thinking can be considered a “mental presence” that is lacking in Japanese classes. As Leki (2008) pointed out, however, it is a culturally imposed bias that you have to include your opinion in class.

We Westerners come from a society that considers performance and participation as much more important factors in the classroom than mere attendance. So when we encounter the Japanese mindset that being physically present is enough, we are bound to clash and try to impose our culture and beliefs onto our students.

So, can Japanese and Western philosophies coexist? Ryback (2011) concludes: “In the end, it is thinking inside the box, contrary to Western contemporary values, that seems to make humanistic psychology work for the Japanese, whose aesthetic values have persevered through the ages” (p. 125). Ryback’s conclusion reminds us that there is more than one way. Instead of going to Japan and trying to make radical changes, we must consider opening up our minds and acquiring a new way of teaching and learning.

Herman (2010) questioned his own teaching philosophies after teaching in China: The more I explore Chinese education, however, the more I am presented with ideas of ‘best practice’ teaching methodologies that often contradict my own. I am personally thankful to have been given the opportunity to explore the educational practices of another culture to help me realize that the concept of ‘quality education’ is not universal and that different cultures may have dramatically differing views on the subject...Realizing that what is considered good education here may not be considered good education somewhere else and vice versa has helped me to broaden my scope of educational practices and has helped me make educational decisions based on my personal goals, the goals of my students, and the mission of my institution. (p. xi-xii)

Like Herman, I want to better understand my teaching experiences in Japan. I realize now that my way is not the only way, and I want to learn from my autoethnography. I also want you, the reader, to learn from my story. If I just let my experiences be in the past, they would have only benefited me, and no one else. I hope that you can read my autoethnography and feel as though you are sufficiently prepared to teach in Japan.

In doing so, keep in mind that culture is extremely complex. We cannot understand a new culture simply by reading a book or attending a workshop. We can, however, begin to learn about a culture in these ways *and* by studying the narratives of those who have lived in the culture.

Chapter 3

Autoethnography: My First Year of Teaching Nishinomiya, Japan

Chapter 3 is the research methodology, data collection, and analysis of the findings—that is, the autoethnography. This thesis is mixed methods and multi-genre. It is an autoethnography reflecting back on my experiences in Japan. It also includes excerpts from my actual journal entries in Japan, so it is a concurrent diary in part as well. I chose to include the following sections because I strongly believe these particular experiences will give the novice EFL teacher insight into my mind during this year abroad. In Chapter 4, I analyze these experiences further and give some recommendations to the novice EFL teacher seeking to follow in my footsteps. In writing this thesis, I followed TESOL's guidelines for ethnography which encompass autoethnography as well:

Note that because of its firsthand, experiential nature, ethnographic knowledge is necessarily tied to particular contexts and periods of time...However, most contemporary ethnographers view it as important to acknowledge the instability and ever-evolving nature of the cultures under study, and to explore their nestedness in and interdependence with broader sociocultural contexts.

(TESOL.org, 2015)

I describe my experience as both emic and etic. I had many layers of insider understanding because of four years of continuous contact with the culture while living with university students at MFWI, and this experience transferred to much of what I did

in Japan, even though I was kept as an outsider there in the middle school and high school.

As an autoethnographer, TESOL asks me to recognize “that culture-as-ideology can lead to certain misinterpretations of social life. Similarly, a culture that is merely lived out is not always open to critical reflection for insiders” (2015), and I hope that any Japanese who read this thesis will learn some new things about themselves and their culture through my experience and my American lens. At the same time, I write this autoethnography with utmost “respect and sensitivity to the community” and I have attempted “to explain some of the questions/contradictions left open” in my interpretation of events, people, and behaviors (TESOL.org, 2015).

TESOL warns ethnographers that explaining “away the tensions in a culture is to impose a consistency and uniformity on the community that serves to stereotype, essentialize, and generalize its culture reductively”. In telling my story, I have aimed to avoid stereotyping or essentializing the culture at the school where I taught and have attempted to present “the culture in all its complexity, instability, and diversity”. I have also adopted a “reflexive approach”—in fact, autoethnography is primarily reflection and interpretation. I have also disclosed my assumptions and biases as well as my “background and identities”. For example, I will discuss the many values that my students and I had in common because I was sent to a private school from grades seven to twelve and proceeded through these grades with a cohort that did not change much from grades nine through twelve. The majority of us in our cohort were girls, so in a way I had this in common with my students in Japan. It seemed that they came from families that really cared about their education, as my family did.

Before reading my story, you should note that this was not only my first year of teaching, but it was also my first year abroad. My experiences might have been vastly different if my first year of teaching had been in the states. As you read, I hope you benefit from my story and feel sufficiently prepared for what you might expect should you teach in Japan someday.

Finally, please be aware that in order to protect privacy, all names in this story have been changed.

I. Arriving in Japan

On August 23rd, 2011, I landed in Osaka, Japan, prepared to embark on a new journey in a new country—my first time outside of the states aside from short vacations in Mexico and Canada. I was eager to discover a new country and culture and to push myself to see more of the world.

Walking from the plane to the luggage ramp, I was greeted by the principal of Mukogawa Women’s University: Junior High and High School (Muko-jo)—the school at which I was going to teach. He could barely speak any English, but he managed to tell me his name: Miyagi. And I was so nervous, I couldn’t speak any Japanese in that moment, so I just kept repeating, “Ah, ah, Miyagi!” I didn’t know what else to say, and I was very uncomfortable with silence at that time in my life. This, of course, was a major faux pas—I should have said, “Miyagi-san” or “Miyagi-Sensei”, and “*Hajimemashite Yoroshiku. Onegaishimasu.* はじめまして。よろしく。おねがいます。”

Along with Principal Miyagi were two of the school’s Japanese teachers and one familiar face—my friend, Amy, who had told me about the teaching opportunity and had

encouraged me to come work with her. As exciting as it was to see Amy, the combination of her naturally quiet nature and my exhausting jetlag and sudden inability to speak Japanese made for an awkwardly silent two-hour ride from Osaka to Nishinomiya. This meeting of newcomers is a major part of the Japanese culture. Receiving and sending off guests is a ritual in Japan.

When we arrived in Nishinomiya, Miyagi, the teachers, and Amy gave me a tour of my new apartment. Everything was said in Japanese, and I was feeling tired and overwhelmed, so after a short time they bid me goodnight and left me to my apartment. I remember looking around that apartment in disbelief—*was this really mine? Was I really in Japan? Was I really about to teach in a country different from my own?* I went to bed with these thoughts swirling in my head, my stomach a mixture of knots and butterflies.

The next day, Amy and I biked over to the school, so she could give me a tour and show me where I would be teaching my classes. The thought of riding bikes to work was a bit shocking to me—in fact, the last time I had biked was when I was a kid, so even riding a bike again was a challenge.

Along with showing me the classrooms, Amy introduced me to a few teachers, one of whom gave me the books I would need in order to teach my eighth grade classes. He told me what chapter we would be starting on and said, “Teach this.” The tour seemed so quick, and I remember feeling as though I had not been adequately prepared for what was to come.

II. The First Day of Class

Figure 1 is a photo of my introductory note and photo in the Muko-jo school newsletter. As you can see, I was very excited to be living and teaching in Japan.



Figure 1. Excerpt from the School Newsletter

Hands shaking, I walked into the classroom and barely mustered out, “Good morning, my name is Miss Holland.” Immediately, all thirty-two students stood up. One student yelled, “Attention, bow!” and they all bowed at me in unison, then sat down. I stood in shock for a second, then a smile spread across my face. Somehow I felt less nervous after the all-class bow.

I came to discover that the students stood up and bowed at the beginning and end of *every class. Every class!* Eventually I got used to the bowing, but I will never forget my initial shock when all thirty-five students stood and bowed at me.

After the bow, I said, “Good morning, how are you?”

Without skipping a beat, the students responded in one uniform voice: “I’m fine thank you, and you?”

And so the lesson began. For the first lesson, I had prepared a PowerPoint slideshow complete with pictures of my entire family, my educational experiences, my hobbies and interests, and my dreams and goals. As I flipped through the pictures, the room filled with lots of “ooo’s” and “ahhh’s”.

“That you?”

“Yes, that was my twenty-second birthday.”

“Oh! Wow!”

I flipped to a picture of my brother, Shaphan.

“Your boyfriend?”

“No, no, this is my older brother Shaphan. He is twenty-seven years old.”

“Wow, he so handsome!”

I flipped to a photo of my bright blue-eyed baby niece chewing on a football.

“Your baby?!”

“No, no, this is my niece.”

Blank stares.

I hesitated, knowing I was supposed to speak English only in the classroom, then decided this could be a good opportunity to teach them some new vocabulary.

“*Core wa watashi no mei.* これはわたしのめい” (This is my niece.)

Gasps.

“*Bikkurishita!* びっくりした ” (I’m shocked!)

I chuckled. Always a delight to shock people who didn’t know I could speak Japanese. I then wrote “niece” on the board.

“*Mei*’ is ‘niece’ in English.”

“Ah. Your niece is so cute!”

And the slideshow continued.

The last slide was called “You!” and I had the students make nametags and introduce themselves to me. I told them to tell me their names and one interesting fact about themselves, and I provided some examples on the slide:

- My name is Yukari, and I like to ride horses.
- My name is Miwano and pineapple is my favorite food!
- My name is Sayuri, and I have an adorable Chihuahua puppy named Sakura.

Of course, their answers weren’t quite as creative as the ones I provided—the majority of them liked “sports”, “band”, “cooking” or whatever other club they were affiliated with, but to my surprise, they weren’t as shy to speak as I had expected.

After that initial lesson, several students started coming to my office daily, showing me pictures of their families, or CDs of their favorite musicians, or even *purikura* プリクラ (small photo strips popular in Japan) of them with their friends. I think that introductory lesson paved the way for my students and me to build a good

rapport together, and should you teach in Japan someday, I strongly suggest you take the time to introduce yourself in detail to your students and vice versa.

Figure 2 shows the last slide of the PowerPoint of my introductory lesson.

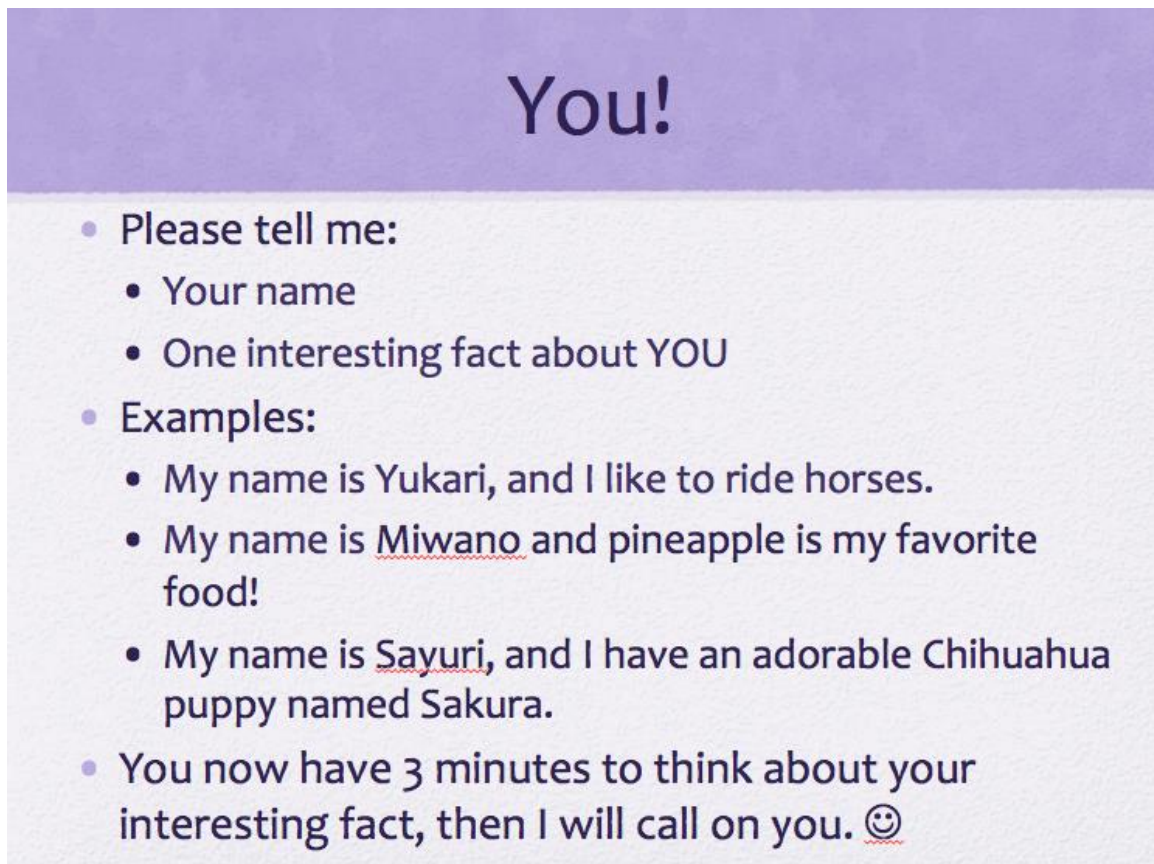


Figure 2. Last Slide from First-Day Lesson

III. A Funny Phonological Experience

I still vividly remember sitting in my office in Nishinomiya, Japan on the second full day of school. Three excited and giggly eighth grade girls were standing by my desk, eager to know their new American teacher.

“Horando-sensei, Horando-sensei, do you have tsu-ee-ta?”

Tsu-ee-ta? What on earth was that?

“Tsu-ee-ta?” I repeated the phrase slowly, making sure I was saying it correctly.

“Yes, yes! Tsu-ee-ta!” The girls were jumping up and down excitedly, repeating the word (*or was it a phrase?*) “tsu-ee-ta” over and over.

“Tsu-ee-ta?” I said it again, this time even more slowly, pronouncing each syllable as clearly as I could.

“Tsu-ee-ta, tsu-ee-ta!” They kept repeating the word, hoping that eventually the meaning would sink in.

We continued in this fashion, repeating the word “tsu-ee-ta” and staring at each other hopefully. When that didn’t work, one of the girls took out her cell phone and started searching for an image to help describe this mysterious “tsu-ee-ta” they were so excited about.

“Here! It’s tsu-ee-ta!” She handed me her phone, pointing at an image of a very familiar blue bird I had seen many times.

“Oh! Twitter!” I exclaimed, happy to finally realize what they were trying to say.

“Yes, tsu-ee-ta!” They clapped, clearly pleased that we finally all understood each other.

I share this story because it is a very clear example of a phonological misunderstanding between Japanese and English.

In Japanese, there is no distinct “t” sound. So those girls could not make the “t” sound in “twitter”, but instead made a “ts” sound. Along with this phonological difference from English, Japanese has only five distinct vowel sounds: ah (**a**), ee (**i**), oo (**u**), eh (**e**), and oh (**o**). There is no “i” (**I**) sound in Japanese, so the “i” in the word

“twitter” sounded like “ee” (**i**). They also have no “schwar” sound in Japanese, so the “er” in “twitter” sounded like an “ah” (**a**).

Breaking down the phonology of Japanese and comparing it with English makes it clear why those girls were saying “tsu-ee-ta” instead of “twitter”—they were the closest sounds they could make to the English consonants and vowels imbedded in the word “twitter”.

This wasn’t the first time I experienced a funny phonological difference between English and Japanese. Five years earlier, when I first started working with Japanese students as a resident assistant at Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute (MFWI), I had a pretty amusing misunderstanding with my students.

It was 1:00AM, and I had just welcomed a group of twelve new students, fresh off the plane from Japan, to Spokane. When they arrived in the dorm around midnight, I gave them a tour of their new home and explained how to use everything in the house. Then I hightailed back to my room for some much-desired sleep.

All of a sudden I hear this knocking on my door at 1:00AM.

“Eka-skyu-za me. When can we take the bahsu (**basu**)?”

I paused for a minute, trying to figure out what this “bahsu” could be.

“Do you mean the bus?”

“Yes, the bahsu.”

“Hmm...let me check.” I went to my desk to look at the MFWI calendar. I saw that I would be giving the students orientations on how to use the city buses the next weekend—so about one week from their arrival.

“We are doing bus orientations next weekend, so you can use the bus in about a week.”

Their jaws dropped and they stared at me in wide-eyed disbelief.

Why are they so eager to use the bus already? They just got here!

“Um, let me show you.” I grabbed the schedule and showed them the bus schedule. I could see they were devastated that they couldn’t take the bus any sooner, so I tried to encourage them.

“Don’t worry, even though you can’t use the bus yet, I have all sorts of fun activities planned for you all tomorrow.”

One of the girls’ eyes started welling up, and I could see that she was about to cry.

Certainly they are not this eager to ride the bus.

“Maybe I am misunderstanding you. Can you explain to me what you mean by the *bahsu*?”

One of the girls started doing swirling hand motions like she was turning something on.

“For to clean body?” She stared at me hopefully.

Bus....Bus...and cleaning your body?

“Oh! The bath! You want to take a bath?” This was my “aha” moment!

“Yes! Can we take the bath?”

“Of course! Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry! You can take a bath right now.”

And that was that.

Of course I have had other humorous phonological encounters with Japanese people, but these two stand out the most to me. In this case, the problem was that in

Japanese there is no “A” (æ) sound, so the closest thing for a Japanese speaker to say for “bath” (bæθ) sounded like “bahsu” (basu), which happened to sound more like “bus” (bəs) to me.

I’ve certainly come a long way from my tsu-ee-ta/twitter and bus/bath days, but I do still have to consciously think of our respective language’s phonological differences when I talk with Japanese ESL speakers.

I share these stories because I believe it behooves the EFL teacher to familiarize herself with the phonology of the languages that her students speak. Doing so can prevent misunderstandings or uncomfortable and awkward situations like the ones I experienced.

IV. An Interesting Cultural Observation

Sleep, sleep, sleep. You may or may not have heard the stereotypes of Japanese people being able to sleep any time anywhere, but from my experience, I found Japanese people sleeping in what I considered the most peculiar places to sleep—on trains, on buses, in offices, and yes, in the classroom.

The first time I noticed a student sleeping was in one of my “Intelligence English” (IE) eighth grade classes. Thinking nothing of it, I walked right over to her desk, woke her up, and told her she needed to remain awake and engaged for the rest of the lesson. Never again did a student sleep in one of my eighth grade classes! Perhaps word spread around to all the other eighth graders. I’m not sure, but I know I never had to deal with the issue again in eighth grade—the grade of which I was the main instructor.

I did, however, assist in a tenth grade English course once a week, and sleeping was a definite issue in this class. As with my eighth grade class, the first time I noticed a

student sleeping, I went and tapped her on the shoulder and told her to stay awake and pay attention to the lesson. She gave me an annoyed scowl and laid her head back on the desk. I stood there dumbfounded!

The next week, the same student was sleeping, and a few other students were sleeping as well. I was shocked, and I asked the main instructor of the course if I should go wake the sleeping students. She replied, “No, they have been studying hard and they need their rest.” It took everything in me to hide my shock and disbelief at what she had just said.

As time went on, there was a constant dichotomy between the awake and alert eighth graders, and the sleepy, disengaged tenth graders. One day, I counted nineteen out of thirty tenth grade students sleeping! This was a massive clash against my culturally bound notions of accepted classroom behavior.

Since arriving back in the states, I have spent some time reflecting upon my experiences in Japan and even researching what others have to say on the matter. I found countless articles reporting on the prevalence of silence in the EFL classroom (Saito, 2011; Cummings, 2004; Murata, 2011; & King, 2013).

Again, as Cummings (2004) states: “Much has been written about intercultural clashes between Western teachers and their Japanese students, with students being described as silent, unmotivated, and hostile, and teachers as overeager to impose their values” (p. 26). Like many EFL teachers, I myself was guilty of seeing this silence as a lack of motivation, rather than as a culturally based behavior. It actually took me returning to the states and researching various TESL scholars as well as different cultures

and ways of thought before I came to this realization. While in Japan, however, I found this silence and sleeping in the classroom rather unnerving.

The problem I was facing was a lack of cultural understanding. As an EFL teacher from America, I strongly believed that student participation was necessary to learning, so when my students did not participate, I took it as a lack of concern for learning and assumed that they did not want to be in the classroom. Now, I realize that my students were not used to this very American style of interactive teaching, and they were used to the one-way lecture style of teaching that is common in Japan.

Silence and sleeping were issues in the classroom that I could never fully accept while teaching in Japan. To me, silence, and especially sleeping, were blatant signs of disrespect.

Now, though it is still a difficult concept for me to accept since I am culturally wired so differently, I realize that physical presence tends to be more valued than mental presence in the Japanese classroom. The important factor was that the students showed up and came to class. This was a very new concept for me, but one that is very important for any Westerner who plans to teach in Japan to grasp.

In their book “Bridging Japanese/North American Differences”, Gudykunst & Nishida (1994) explain how sleep itself carries a different connotation in Japan than it does in America: “‘Sleepy’ has a negative connotation in the United States, but not in Japan” (p. 77-78). Japanese people don’t necessarily view sleeping in the classroom as a necessarily “rude” act, the way we Westerners might.

V. Bowing Properly

In some countries the smile is regarded as most important, and in others verbal expressions are most important, but in Japanese-speaking society bowing is regarded as most important in terms of politeness. It is better to bow without saying anything than to say something polite without bowing (Mizutani & Mizutani, 1987, p. 53).

It was a cold, blustery, winter day, and Amy and I were bundled up in our warmest winter jackets, with hand-warmers tucked into our pockets. It was the entrance exam day, and the two of us had been asked to be the greeters and the “face” of the school to all the potential new students and parents.

Lined across from each other on the path to enter the testing building, we cheerfully greeted the parents and students as they trickled in. Together, we would say, “*Ohayou gozaimasu* おはようございます” (good morning), and take a deep bow. Our bows were met with smiling and happy faces, so despite the cold, we were having a pleasant time.

About forty minutes into bowing in the cold, Alex, the fifty-year-old British man who acted as a kind of liaison between the Japanese teachers and the foreign teachers, came walking up to us with a slight frown on his face.

“Girls, I need to have a chat with you.”

Alex pulled us aside and explained to us that it is very rude to keep your hands in your pockets when you are bowing. One of the Japanese teachers, who remains unnamed to this day, saw us bowing improperly and got very upset that we had our hands in our

pockets. This teacher immediately went to Alex and asked him to scold us for our poor behavior.

I remember feeling a bit betrayed. *Why didn't this teacher just come tell us directly?* In my eyes, it would have been less intimidating had the teacher come and explained to us that we were not being polite according to Japanese custom. Instead, this teacher used Alex as what Feiler (2004) refers to as a “go-between”, so he/she didn't have to confront us directly.

Gudykunst & Nishida (1994) share some insights as to why Japanese people tend to use a third party for confrontation: “Japanese avoid direct confrontation and use indirect strategies when their privacy is threatened by others (Naotsuka & Akamoto, 1981)” (p. 72). So it is possible that this teacher didn't come to us directly because he/she wanted to protect his/her privacy.

Later, Gudykunst & Nishida state: “Japanese prefer ‘passive’ forms of criticism (e.g., express dissatisfaction nonverbally or ambiguously)” (p. 74). Therefore, another reason the teacher did not come to us directly might have been because he/she preferred this passive or indirect style of confrontation.

Another possibility was that he/she didn't want to shame us or break our harmony as colleagues: “Japanese perceive that they lose face when they are not able to maintain ingroup harmony (e.g., when they shame or disgrace a friend or coworker)” (p. 79).

One more possibility for the other teacher not coming to us directly might have been that he/she did not know us very well and felt uncomfortable approaching us: “In collectivistic cultures like Japan, individuals do not expose their true feelings until they know another person well” (p. 66).

Alexander (2010) suggests some additional insight into why this teacher never approached us directly: “Japanese etiquette discourages straightforwardness and the expression of opinions, thoughts and deeds” (p. 70). And one reason for this indirect approach is to maintain harmony and peace:

The pursuit of external propriety and of harmonious relations between people is the next manifestation of Japanese perfectionism. A person must not be suddenly surprised, hurt or be confused by something. (p. 79)

Again, this teacher may not have wanted to surprise or confuse us. As Alexander writes, “The well-known Japanese politeness is based on this tendency to maintain well-balanced and harmonious relations” (p. 63). All in all, maintaining harmony in the Japanese collectivist society is of utmost importance. So what I perceived as a betrayal was more than likely an effort to keep the peace or save face.

Whatever the reason may be, if a third party comes and tells you that you have done something to upset another person, rather than immediately taking offense and wondering who is “tattling” on you, realize that this is just the Japanese way, and there are several viable reasons why this person employed a go-between.

In my story, you may be wondering why it was such a concern for Amy and I to bow properly. Bowing is a very important form of nonverbal communication in Japan, and it must be done correctly to convey the correct message. Gudykunst & Nishida (1994) share some insights on this as well: “Japanese communication focuses more on nonverbal aspects of communication than communication in the United States does” (p. 62). And later they add: “Japanese display more nonverbal behavior to strangers than do North Americans” (p. 66). In Japan, nonverbal communication is just as important, if not

more so, as verbal communication. With this insight, it makes sense why this teacher wanted us to bow correctly.

When you are teaching in Japan, remember that you might be being watched, even when you are unaware. You should do your best to learn the nonverbal rules that are expected of you. Feiler (2004) tells a funny story about when he rode his bicycle through a red light in Japan. He states:

Sure enough, some citizen in town eventually witnessed my showing such wanton disrespect for the law, and she telephoned my office to express her disapproval.

Like an insect flying unaware through the woods, I had been trapped in a web (p. 25).

Feiler's experience was similar to mine in that he never directly met the person whom he had offended. Perhaps like me, Feiler felt a bit betrayed or anxious, wondering who was watching him and "telling on" him.

It is my hope that you will benefit from my story. If a situation like this happens to you, I hope that you will not think as I did and automatically assume the worst, but instead you will go through the possible reasons why the person did not approach you directly and have a more empathetic understanding of the situation as a whole.

VI. Clever Sensei

In both my SE and IE courses, I co-taught: there was a Japanese teacher assigned to each eighth grade class along with me. Feiler (2004) also co-taught in Japan and describes this co-teaching quite well:

the Ministry of Education decided to invite native speakers of English into the schools to add new “life” to the language. Under this plan, the foreign teachers would work alongside Japanese teachers in an arrangement the government termed “Team Teaching”...we learned quickly what the government did not know: teaching is an awkward team sport. (p. 30)

I believe true team-teaching would be a bit difficult, but that was not exactly what I ended up doing. Despite the terms, I was the main instructor in all the eighth grade IE courses, and two Japanese teachers were the main instructors in the two SE eighth grade courses. What this looked like was as follows: I would plan and prepare all IE classes, then the Japanese co-teacher would come join and be there in the classroom if translation was needed. My co-teachers generally stood in the back of the room any time I was lecturing and would walk throughout the classroom and help students anytime I had them working in small groups. In the SE courses, I would prepare a lesson for the first half of the class, and the Japanese instructor would prepare a lesson for the second half of the class. This ended up working out fine and wasn't as awkward as Feiler's experience seemed to be, because even though we were “team-teaching”, we were each teaching our own portions of the class, and not interrupting or teaching over each other.

As a result of this co-teaching, I worked with several teachers throughout the year, but there was one particular teacher who made an especially strong impact on me. To protect his identity, I will refer to him as Mr. Clever from here on out. Mr. Clever co-taught with me in one of my SE classes, and he was always making both me and the students laugh.

One of Mr. Clever's pet-phrases was, "Let's boogie!" Every time we finished our morning staff meetings, Mr. Clever would come find me to go to homeroom. He would approach my desk and say, "We'd better get to homeroom." Then I would grab my books and he would say, "Let's boogie!" And we would proceed to class.

Once on a class trip on a particularly warm day, Mr. Clever looked at me and said, "It's flippin' hot!" I laughed so hard that "flippin'" soon became one of Mr. Clever's pet-phrases to say to me.

One of our reading units was all about great white sharks, and Mr. Clever really enjoyed the topic. He asked me to come up with an engaging lesson plan on great white sharks for a day that the principal of the school was going to come visit our class. I decided to do a mock-debate and created a topic for students to debate: should we protect great white sharks? The day before our observation, I led a PowerPoint with the students to help them prep for the debate. Their homework was to come up with three arguments both for and against protecting great white sharks and come to class ready to informally debate.

On "Shark Day"—the title I give to our infamous debate—not only the principal came to observe, but also several teachers and parents joined in on the fun. To my delight, the students exceeded my expectations and came up with arguments that I hadn't even prompted. The debate was going quite well, and every once in awhile, Mr. Clever would jump in and play the "Devil's Advocate", trying to get the students to think outside the box. Suddenly, out of nowhere, and in front of our principal, colleagues, and many parents, Mr. Clever asked, "If I were a shark, would I be delicious?" Of course that made

me chuckle. Mr. Clever was always catching me off-guard and giving me much-needed doses of humor.

Speaking of Mr. Clever catching me off-guard, every time it was a parent-visiting day, Mr. Clever would come find me shortly before class and ask me to teach the whole class. I was never told in advance, so I would find out the day of that I was being observed. I had to quickly come up with a lesson that I thought would be enjoyable for parents to watch. For a couple of these observations, Mr. Clever didn't even come to class. I can only speculate as to why, as he never really gave me a reason. Most people would be frustrated by these last-minute surprises, but I think Mr. Clever must have sensed that I enjoy a good challenge, and he wanted to give me the opportunity to create an engaging lesson.

To this day, I still think fondly of Mr. Clever, remembering all the laughs we shared. Looking back now, I wish I would have taken more time to get to know both Mr. Clever and my other Japanese colleagues. I think I would have understood the culture even better if I had built stronger relationships with my coworkers. I will touch on this more in Section 8—"Life Outside of Work", but when you teach overseas, you should really try to build relationships with the people who are native to the culture in which you are teaching. They will be your cultural brokers (Pipher, 2002), helping you adjust to the new culture.

Figure 3 shows the first slide from the "Shark Day" debate preparation lesson.



Figure 3. “Shark Day” Slide 1

On the second slide, I presented the debate question, along with example answers.

Figure 4 shows the second slide.

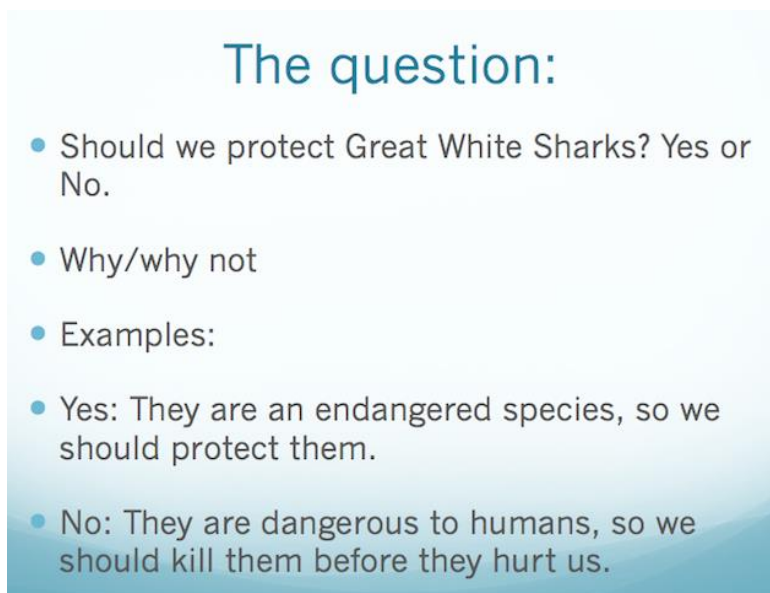


Figure 4. “Shark Day” Slide 2

After we went over the second slide, I asked the students to decide if we should or should not protect great white sharks, then work with a partner to come up with arguments for both sides of the debate. Figure 5 shows this preparation slide.



Figure 5. “Shark Day” Slide 3

On the last slide, I gave students some example ideas for arguments both for and against protecting great white sharks. Figure 6 shows this final slide. As I mentioned, even though I gave students ideas for their arguments, they still came up with their own arguments and carried a very well thought-out debate on “Shark Day”.



Figure 6. “Shark Day” Slide 4

VII. Living to Work

“The idea that labor and persistence can solve any problem is also widespread in Japan today, in the time of efficiency and rationality” (Alexander, 2010, p. 189).

Perhaps my biggest obstacle in Japan was my inability to fully adapt to the unwritten mentality my Japanese coworkers had of what I call “living to work”. What I mean when I say “living to work” is that your work *is* your life.

In America, most people have the mindset of what I call “working to live”—in other words, we work just enough to be able live our lives. Our real lives are outside of

our work, and we work to make enough money to enjoy those lives. But in Japan I often found that work *is* life.

Alexander (2010) provides some reasons why Japanese people tend to place so much value in their work: “there is no doubt in the Japanese mind that diligence and a strong work ethic are directly connected to a sense of happiness and satisfaction” (p. 189). He also states: “Longer office hours, shorter vacations and a high sense of responsibility for the company make employment the main purpose of life for the modern Japanese” (p. 203). I found these statements to be very true: work seemed to be the main purpose in my Japanese coworkers’ lives.

Though our contract hours were 8:00AM-5:00PM Monday through Friday and 8:00AM-12:30PM every other Saturday, teachers would get to the office as early as 5:00AM and leave as late as 7:00PM daily. Some teachers would even come in on the off Saturdays or even on Sundays. Even as a foreign guest, I was expected to come to work at least an hour early and leave at least an hour late, despite my contract hours. If I left right at 5:00PM, it was frowned upon, so even if all my grading and lesson preparations were up to speed, I would wait in my office until after 5:00PM, so I didn’t appear to be a slacker.

Alexander’s (2010) research on Japan agrees with my experience: “an ideal employee should be constantly busy simply because it is good to be busy” (p. 193). He also quotes G. Reynolds, who once worked for Sumitomo Electronics: “The Japanese think that, regardless of the actual workload, a person should look very busy...Both genuine and assumed diligence is considered equally virtuous’...” (p. 193). To further

this mindset that “looking busy” is a virtue, The International Labor Organization report in 1993 states:

Japanese employees spend much time in their offices to demonstrate their devotion to the company, but their working efficiency per hour is only 46 percent that of the French and 39 percent that of the Germans (p. 194).

This coincides that with the concept that “looking busy” is as important as actually being busy in the Japanese workplace. My experience in Japan was very similar. Even though I was finished with all my work for the day, I would wait in the office until at least 5:15PM, so I didn’t appear to be rushing out of the office before my coworkers.

Alexander’s (2010) research concurs with my experiences once again: “Japanese employees cannot think of leaving their offices before dark” (p. 195). He also states: “Working late has become a national tradition that did not yield even to the changes introduced by Americans during the postwar occupation” (p. 194).

So why do the Japanese spend so many hours at work, even if the hours aren’t productive or necessary? Once again, Alexander (2010) sums up this Japanese mindset: “The time spent in the office by an employee is the most obvious indicator of his serious and responsible attitude toward his duties” (p. 194). Further, “While Americans take the shortest path to the goal, using the most efficient resources and methods, the Japanese have to follow a sophisticated route that is dictated by numerous unwritten rules and traditions” (p. 196).

In an article on workaholism in Japan, Kanai and Wakabayahi (2004) speak of “the characteristic Japanese management style featured by life-long employment” (p.

538). If a Japanese employee hopes to have life-long employment, they need to follow these unwritten rules of spending as many hours in the workplace as possible.

Also in this article, I learned the terms: “*Karoshi* (death by overwork) or *Karojisatsu* (suicide by overwork)” (p. 540). Though there were no suicides at my workplace while I was in Japan, I did see a great amount of overwork. I even felt that I overworked in order to fit in. I believe that this extreme dedication to work could lead to mental anxiety and potentially *karoshi* or *karojisatsu*. Indeed, “...even in the present depression period, increased work overload and a fear of losing jobs contribute to increasing mental problems among employees at the place of employment in Japan” (p. 540). If overworking is causing mental problems among Japanese, it is certainly an issue to be aware of for anyone planning to work in Japan, the EFL teacher included.

Because I came from an American mindset that the quickest and most efficient way is the best way to work, it was extremely hard for me to submit to the unwritten Japanese rule of staying in my workplace additional hours every day, regardless of whether I had work to do or not. In regard to these unwritten Japanese rules, Alexander (2010) states:

The many unwritten but strictly maintained rules are one of the main reasons that Japanese society remains relatively closed and incomprehensible in the eyes of strangers. Foreign guests’ unawareness of these rules has always caused anxiety.
(p. 64)

Indeed, I felt some anxiety when I learned that I was expected to stay in the office daily for additional hours beyond those spelled out in my contract. Certainly be aware of this mindset if you choose to teach in Japan.

VII. Material Culture

Now onto a much more positive experience I had as a teacher in Japan. One of the most delightful aspects of Japanese culture to me was the practice of gift giving. I was showered with gifts from Japanese people during my year abroad.

Alexander (2010) states: “Exchanging gifts and messages play an important role in relationships and are an integral part of Japanese culture and enjoy a long and rich history” (p. 80). I found this to be very true. Nearly every time I met up with my Japanese friends from MFWI, they would bring me some sort of a gift. I even had a group of former students come to my house and bring me a *takoyaki* maker when they heard that I enjoyed *takoyaki* たこやき (deep fried dumplings filled with octopus and covered in a delicious sauce). And it was not only my friends who gave me gifts. Once I was taking a walk during my lunch break at school and I passed by a house where a lady was outside gardening. I stopped to admire her work and told her that her flowers looked beautiful. She smiled and said, “*Chotto matte.* ちょっとまって” (Just a moment). Then she grabbed a shovel and started digging out some of her beautiful flowers. She handed me the flowers, and I stood there speechless. I told her I couldn’t take them from her, but she insisted. I went home that day and planted them immediately. Every time I looked at those flowers in pots outside my apartment, I thought of that sweet stranger. I will never forget her kindness and the Japanese practice of gift giving—what a beautiful cultural practice.

In addition to gifts in general, Japanese people also showered me with homemade gifts: “Nowhere in the world do people send as many cards and greetings as in Japan, and it does not appear that the tradition is being affected by the growing prevalence of email

and other up-to-date means of communication” (p. 83). This also agrees with my experience. I received many handmade cards from my students, from my Japanese friends, and even from my colleagues.

Sohan (2015) refers to these handmade gifts as “material culture”. She writes about the Gee Bend’s quiltmakers and suggests that these handmade quilts represent these women’s lives and give us insight into their culture. She states:

Scholars in English studies have increasingly come to recognize the value of studying women’s material culture—including dressmaking, textile and sampler making, quiltmaking, scrapbooking, and cookbook writing—as an important discursive practice (see Mattingly; Goggin and Tobin; Eves; Showalter; Hedges).
(p. 295)

Studying the handmade material items of a group of people can teach us in part about their culture. Sohan speaks of how the Gee Bend women write their lives through their quilts and “the power of the needle as pen” (p. 296). So too, my Japanese students and friends used the power of their hands to express their lives and their gratitude to me. I was able to learn through my students’ and friends’ material culture their creativity and the value they placed in using both their hands and their time to bless another person.

For my birthday, several of my eighth grade students made me a homemade book called “Holland came to Japan”. In the book, they added photos and wrote sweet notes expressing their gratitude for me. Figure 7 is a photo of the cover of this sweet book.



Figure 7. Holland Came to Japan

Throughout the school year, I also received sweet notes from my students. They always brought an instant smile to my face. Figure 8 shows a loving note I received from a student one day.



Figure 8. A Sweet Note

Every time students left for a short holiday or went on a day trip outside of school, they would come to my office with souvenirs from their trip. Other times, students would randomly surprise me with a homemade gift, just because. All of these gifts made me feel extremely loved and valued. Figure 9 shows a sweet scrapbook page some students made me “just because”.



Figure 9. Holland is Eternal Hero!

On Valentine’s Day, students came filtering into my office one by one, showering me with gifts. I was so amazed by the amount of gifts that I took a picture of my desk covered in homemade notes and sweets. Figure 10 is a photo showing the display of their gifts on my desk. Again, these are examples of material culture, much of which was handmade.



Figure 10. My Desk Piled up with Gifts from Students

The pictures in the bulletin board on my desk in the above photo were also gifts from students. Not only did the students give me gifts, but also, the English teachers got together and bought me flowers and made me a lovely note for my birthday. Figure 11 shows me holding these birthday flowers.



Figure 11. Birthday Flowers from my Colleagues

This generous display of material culture and gift giving is one that I will always remember fondly. I try to emulate this generosity and kindness in my own life, though I am not as talented with my hands as my Japanese brothers and sisters.

VIII. Multi-modality and Discussions

At the beginning of my teaching in Japan, I often felt like I was fighting against the traditional position as the lecturer. The students were used to this one-way form of communication in the classroom, and, much like Cummings' (2004) experience, it was

sometimes “like pulling teeth” to get them to talk. Feiler (2004) provides some explanation for why Japanese students might not initially respond well to interaction in the classroom: “Everybody seemed to understand. But when I moved toward the class, the silence quickly returned. Not only had these students never shaken hands, I realized, but they had also been taught never to look a stranger in the eye” (p. 38). The students had been enculturated to act a certain way in the classroom, so they expected me to lecture while they listened—they weren’t prepared to actively participate in my lessons.

After some thought, I asked one of my SE co-teachers if I could bring some conversation practice into the classroom. To my delight, he said yes. So each day at the beginning of class, I would provide some conversation topics, and try to draw my students out of their shells. Sometimes I would show a YouTube video clip and have students respond to it in conversation, and other times I would provide a slideshow of conversation starters. Sometimes we would even have class debates on more controversial matters. When I first introduced this debate concept, the students all tended to agree on topics. So I would play the “Devil’s Advocate” to try to get them to see another perspective. After awhile, students began to show some diversity and difference in opinion during our debates, and this was a joy for me to witness.

What follows below are some actual photos of PowerPoints I created to foster English conversation in the classroom. Figure 12 shows the first slide of every conversation PowerPoint I made. I did these conversation starters daily at the beginning of our SE classes, and I called them “Conversation Time”.

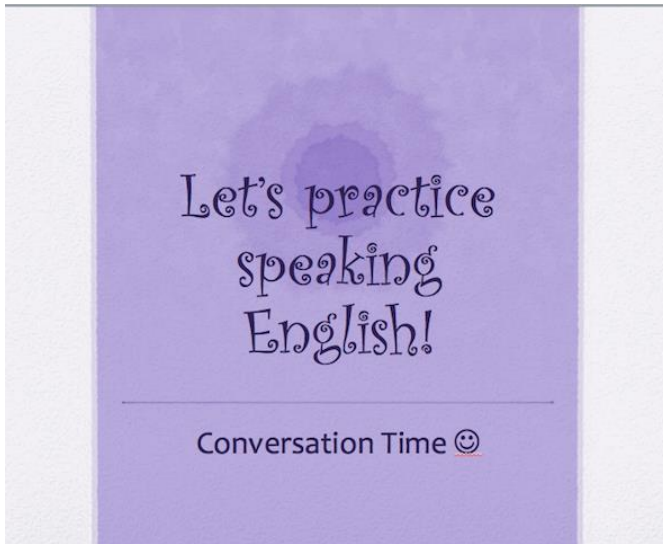


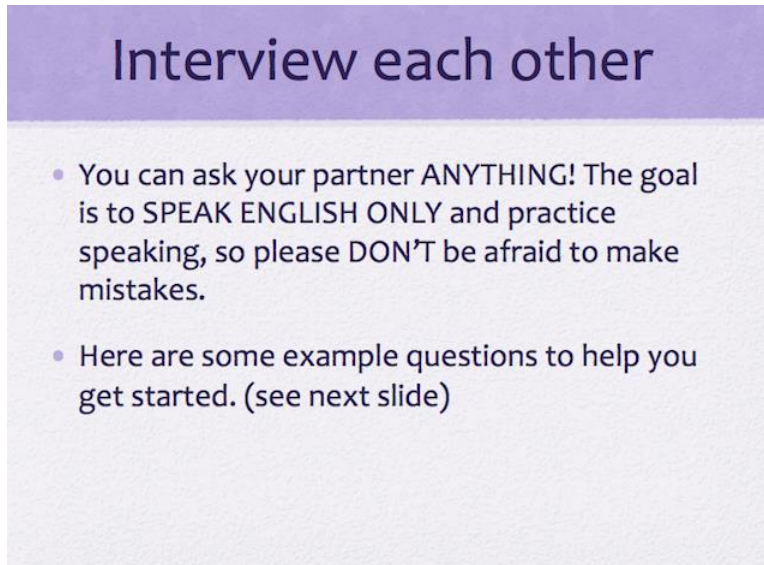
Figure 12. “Conversation Time” First Slide

Figure 13 shows a conversation practice we did where students got to pretend they were famous. They got to choose what they were famous for and then interview their partner.



Figure 13. “Conversation Time” Imagine You Are Famous!

I told students they could ask each other anything in their interview, as long as they spoke in English. Figure 14 shows the directions I gave.



The slide features a purple header with the title 'Interview each other' in white text. Below the header, on a light gray background, are two bullet points in dark blue text. The first bullet point states that students can ask their partner anything, with the goal of speaking English only and practicing speaking, and that they should not be afraid to make mistakes. The second bullet point provides example questions to help students get started, referring to the next slide.

Figure 14. “Conversation Time” Interview Each Other

I gave the students some example questions to give them ideas for how to interview each other. Figure 15 shows these example questions.

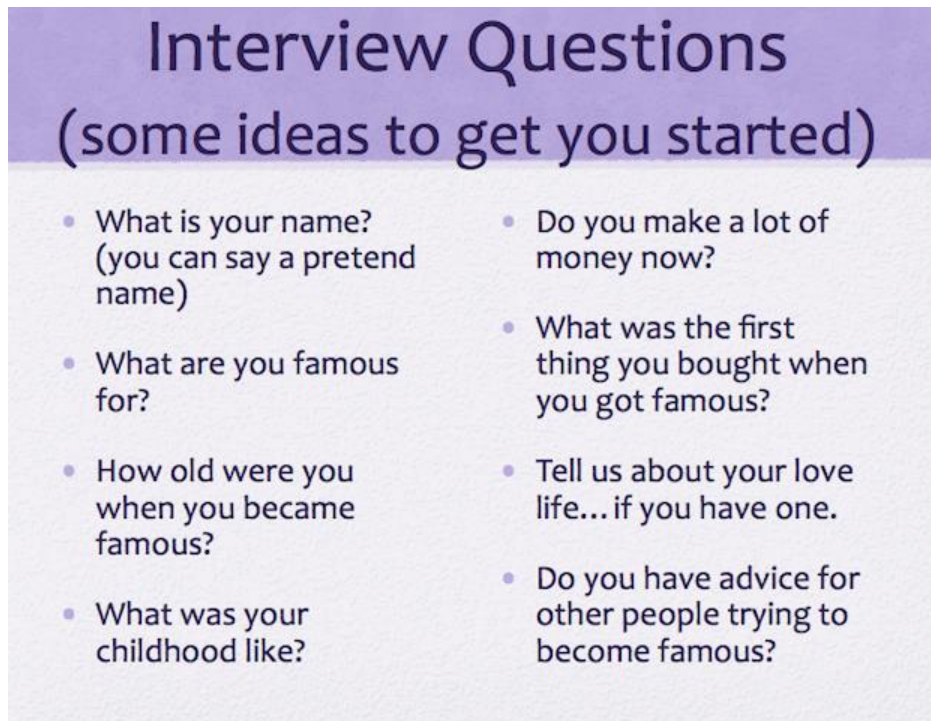


Figure 15. “Conversation Time” Interview Questions

After the students interviewed each other, I had volunteers come to the front of the class and introduce themselves as the famous person they were pretending to be. There was a lot of great laughter and a lot of great English spoken this day.

Another fun “Conversation Time” PowerPoint I created was called “Would You Rather?” I had students work in pairs answering each question, and then I took a poll of the whole class. Interestingly, there was a lot of diversity in opinions this day. Figure 16 shows the questions I provided.

Would you rather...

- Would you rather be rich or poor?
- Would you rather be a boy or a girl?
- Would you rather short or tall?
- Would you rather go to California or New York?
- Would you rather live in Europe or Asia?
- Would you rather live in an apartment building or a house?

Figure 16. “Conversation Time” Would You Rather?

On another day, I decided to create a conversation around the topic of animals and in particular, pets. Figure 17 shows the conversation stimulators I provided for this day.

Animals (Pets)

- Do you have a pet?
- How old is it?
- Where did you get it from?
- Who takes care of it?
- What does it look like (color, breed, etc.)?
- What do you feed it?
- Do you play with it?
- What is its name?
- How did you choose this name?
- Does it know any tricks or understand any words?
- If you don't have a pet, why not? Would you ever consider getting a pet?
- What are the pros and cons of keeping a pet?
- What is the best pet to own?
- Do you know someone who owns an unusual pet?
- Do you think that animals dream?
- What animals do you think are cute? What animals do you think are ugly?
- Do you think animals have souls?
- If you saw a stranger drowning, and you also saw your pet drowning, and you could only save one, who would you save? What would most people choose?

Figure 17. “Conversation Time” Animals (Pets)

One day, I decided to create some “would you ever” conversation in the classroom. Figure 18 shows the questions I provided this day. This conversation was a really fun one full of lots of giggles and humor. It also taught the students a lot of fun new vocabulary.

Would you ever...

- Would you ever donate blood?
- Would you ever get plastic surgery?
- Would you ever donate a kidney or another vital organ?
- Would you ever marry someone your parents didn't approve of?
- Would you ever go bungee jumping?
- Would you ever go skydiving?
- Would you eat a live cricket for \$500? If not, how much money would it take?
- Would you divorce your husband if your favorite celebrity wanted to marry you?
- Would you ever adopt a child?
- Would you ever give your child up for adoption?

Figure 18. “Conversation Time” Would You Ever?

It should be noted that I would scaffold each of these slides. We went over the questions one by one, making sure everyone understood the questions, then I would put them into discussion pairs/groups for a set amount of time, and then volunteers would share their answers with the class. During the discussion time, I would go around and help students with vocabulary and pronunciation so they felt confident enough in their English to share their answers with the class. By the end of my time teaching in Japan, these conversation practices were a highlight for both my students and me. If you find that you have enough freedom to bring some of your own curriculum ideas to the table in

Japan, I strongly recommend you bring in something fun and active like these conversation practices that will build your students' confidence in actually using English.

IX. Sports Day and Class Trips

Perhaps my most joyous and delightful memories from teaching in Japan are special traditions that I have never seen here in America. The first I experienced was “Sports Day”. On this day, the entire school gets together on a huge field and spends the whole day doing dance routines and sports competitions. Parents and family are invited, and it is a big celebration. There are even food and drink booths where you can buy snacks. The student routines are immaculate, and they spend the entire day before Sports Day practicing the routines at the field. Figure 19 shows a photo I took of the students practicing one of their routines. They formed hearts with their bodies, and it was beautiful to watch.



Figure 19. Sports Day Practice: Hearts

Even just on the practice day, their routines were beautifully detailed. Figure 20 shows another photo I took of the students forming circles with their bodies.



Figure 20. Sports Day Practice: Circles

The actual “Sports Day” was a very joyous one, and I loved watching all the dance routines and spending time with my students outside the classroom. I even competed in one of the sports competitions and loved hearing my students cheer for me. “Go Horando-sensei, go!”

At one point, several of my eighth grade students surrounded me and started braiding my hair. It was so cute that I had Amy take a photo. Figure 21 shows this.



Figure 21. Students Braiding My Hair On Sports Day

Another really fun cultural experience I enjoyed through my school was taking my students on class trips. On one excursion, we went to Nara, a beautiful place in Japan where there are gorgeous temples and friendly deer that just come up to anyone. You can pet them and feed them, and it is quite the experience.

Figure 22 shows some of my students posing with one of these friendly deer.



Figure 22. Class Trip to Nara: Students with a Deer

At the time when we went to Nara, the cherry blossoms were in full bloom and the whole town was breathtakingly beautiful. I snapped a photo of some of my students walking under the cherry blossoms. Figure 23 is this photo.



Figure 23. Class Trip to Nara: Students under the Cherry Blossoms

We also had group tours in the historic and immaculate temples, so I took a photo of some of my students outside one of the temples. Figure 24 is one of these photos.



Figure 24. Class Trip to Nara: Students by a Temple

All in all, the day trip to Nara was a delightful experience for me, and one that I had never experienced teaching here in the states. I loved getting to know both my fellow teachers and my students better outside of the classroom, and I loved getting to see a different part of Japan I might not have seen on my own.

On another class trip, we took our students to Nagahama for a few days. I describe this trip in much more detail in section 13—“Letters to Grandma”, and I also include more photos from the Nagahama trip in section 13. But I will include some photos here as well. One of the most enlightening cultural experiences on this trip for me was the daily morning exercise. Immediately after the wake-up call, the entire eighth

grade students and teachers would gather together on a field outside the hotel and do exercises together. One teacher would put on light, flouncy music, and lead everyone in a series of stretches and light dance routines. This was so strange and new to me that I had to take a quick photo. Figure 25 is a photo of the first day of morning exercises.



Figure 25. Class Trip to Nagahama: Morning Exercises

Another highlight of this trip was getting to try all sorts of delicious foods. The first night, we had a delicious dinner of *shabu shabu* しゃぶしゃぶ—thinly sliced meats that you cook in a small boiling pot of water then dip in different sauces. I was blown

away by how much food was at each table. In the morning, we had a breakfast buffet overflowing with all kinds of food. Most of these foods were familiar to me, but there was one food item—*natto* なつとう (fermented soy beans) that I had never tried before. One of the teachers dared me to try it. They say that *natto* is very good for you, especially for giving you healthy skin. So I tried it, and it was a very new taste for me—a bit bitter and strange—but I am glad I tried it. Figure 26 shows me holding the *natto*.



Figure 26. Class Trip to Nagahama: My First Time Eating “Natto” なつとう

I had another fun “first” during this class trip. I had heard of *onsens* 温泉(public baths modeled after natural hot springs), but I had not yet been to one. Our hotel had a very nice *onsen*, and one of the teachers—the same one who dared me to try *natto*—recommended I try the *onsen* while our students were packing their bags and checking out of the hotel. He said it would be the perfect time to try it, as there would probably be no one there. I decided to try it, and I am very happy I did.

Walking into the changing room, I was almost shaking as I took off my clothes—I was so nervous to be exposed in public. I was holding my clothes to cover myself, frantically looking for a towel, when a sweet little old Japanese lady came up to me smiling. She handed me a tiny towel. I thanked her and tried to cover myself with it, but it was way too tiny to cover my unclothed frame. She could sense I was nervous, and she started giggling. Somehow her laughing calmed my nerves a bit. She then beckoned me to enter the *onsen*.

Holding the tiny towel to my frame, I walked out into the *onsen*. To my delight, there was no one there! I dipped my toes into the warm water then fully submerged. It was delightful and incredibly relaxing. I stayed there soaking for a good twenty-minutes, and I have to say it was a wonderful first time experience in a public bath. My next experience with public baths was in Korea, and this was a much more shocking experience to say the least—I’ll have to save that story for another book. Figure 27 is a photo I took while I was relaxing in this peaceful Japanese *onsen*.



Figure 27. Class Trip to Nagahama: My first time in an “Onsen” 温泉

A few months after the Nagahama trip, I was asked to be an escort on the tenth grade trip to Mount Hachibuse. What a delightful trip this was! I was amazed by all the breathtaking scenery in Hachibuse and was happy that we spent the majority of our time outside. When we first arrived, we went on a long hike up the mountain. It was beautiful to watch the students trekking up the mountain. At the top, there was a little mist that made the sight even more striking. Figure 28 shows a photo I took of the students hiking up the mountain.



Figure 28. Class Trip to Mount Hachibuse: Hiking up the Mountain

The hike itself was rather strenuous. In fact, many students didn't make it to the top. I was surprised to see students trickling off and having to head back down so early in the hike. But some students did make it to the top and proudly took photos with me from the view above. Figure 29 is one of these photos.



Figure 29. Class Trip to Mount Hachibuse: Post-hike Photo

As with the Nagahama class trip, the food during the Hachibuse trip was perfectly prepared and delicious. On the first night, we had a *nabe* なべ dinner. To make *nabe*, you slice up beef and vegetables and throw them into a boiling pot of water. Each person has a bowl of rice and dipping sauces and takes out some beef or veggies individually, enjoying them with the rice and sauce. It is a delicious community meal and one of my favorites. Figure 30 is a photo I took of some of the students preparing to eat *nabe*.



Figure 30. Class Trip to Mount Hachibuse: Nabe なべ Dinner

The next day, we spent most of our time outside. One particularly exciting experience was catching fish with our hands. Some members of the community in Hachibuse had set up small pebbles and rocks in one of the nearby streams to trap fish swimming down the river, and they encouraged us to try to catch these fish with our hands. We spent at least an hour out there trying, and some of us were successful! One of the first students to catch a fish with her hands was very excited and I took a photo with her. Figure 31 is this photo. You can see that she caught a very tiny fish, but it was exciting nonetheless!



Figure 31. Class Trip to Mount Hachibuse: Catching Fish with Our Hands

That evening, some of the locals taught us how to make *mochi* もち, a pounded rice cake that kind of has the texture of cookie dough. The students got to each take a mallet and pound rice, slowly turning it into *mochi*. Even the teachers got to join in on the fun. Figure 32 shows me pounding some *mochi*. After we made the *mochi*, we formed them into small rice cakes and enjoyed eating them—what a delicious and exciting experience!



Figure 32. Class Trip to Mount Hachibuse: Pounding Rice to Make Mochi もち

Life outside the class with both my students and co-teachers provided some of the most rewarding memories of my time in Japan. I got to participate in many new cultural experiences and witness all of the natural beauty that fills Japan. I learned that Japan was

not this “concrete jungle” I had expected before arriving—instead it was a breathtaking, beautiful place, full of life and peace. I will always remember all these extra-curricular excursions with my students fondly.

X. Darker Times

When you move to another country, it is possible you will experience “deracination”. Reeves (2012) defines “deracination” as “the feeling of being uprooted when torn from our communities where we are safe and enter those where we feel unsafe, confused, and devalued” (p. 1). Living in a new country and a new culture that is different from your own might make you feel a little unsafe, confused, or devalued. I certainly felt confused and devalued at different times during my stay in Japan, and I analyze possible causes for these feelings in depth in chapter 4.

Throughout my year in Japan, I did face some darker times in my psyche. During these times of mental unrest, I wrote in my journal quite a bit. In these more difficult and uncomfortable moments, there was a common trend: all of these moments of despair were dated during the frigid cold winter months, the time of year when I felt the most homesick in Japan.

Though it exposes me a bit, I believe it can benefit you, the novice EFL teacher, to gain some insight into the inner workings of my mind during these uncomfortable months in my life. What follows are some actual excerpts from my journal during these heavier times:

January 26th, 2012

Dreams about my mother's disappointment, dreams about failing a class, dreams about being late or missing out on important things. Are they all indicators that somewhere deep inside my subconscious I feel inadequate? I'm considering joining a creative writing class. It seems scary, but I think scary is what I need. Do I trust strangers with my deepest thoughts? What if they try to steal my ideas? I've always wanted to write fiction, but somehow I always write about my own feelings and events that have impacted me. I want to write something creative and exciting, but not about me. I need to get out of me, out of my head. Why have I lost my imagination? When did it happen? Now, when I finally have the time to write, suddenly nothing comes to me. Why?

January 27th, 2012

About a month ago, a man I work with passed away. I didn't really know him—never really got the chance—but the few times I passed him in the hall, he always had a kind word and asked me how I was adjusting to life in Japan. He often smiled, and it was a very genuine smile, which tends to be a little more rare in Japanese men. When he smiled, you could tell he was in pain, but he was so kind-hearted, and he wanted to warm your heart. I always thought he was a kind man I'd like to get to know while I was here. When he took time off to go to the hospital, I didn't realize it meant goodbye. I didn't realize how serious his cancer was. He was in the hospital for a month or so, and then he was gone. I never got the chance to get to know him. When I found out he was dead, I felt my stomach drop a little. I know I never got to know him, but I could tell he was a

kind soul that I would've loved to know. Death is such a frightening and mysterious thing.

February 4th, 2012

There are so many things I miss from back home. Maybe I'm going through a stage of homesickness or culture shock. I'm not sure. So I'm not going to make any official decisions yet about staying or leaving. But it's looking more and more like I'll be leaving.

February 7th, 2012

Guess it's that time where I start writing again. Gosh, can't shake this bad mood where I want desperately to go back to America. It's not like it's terrible here, I just miss SO much from back home! And so many people. But enough of that, nothing I can do about the next seven months, so I'll just keep pressing on and making it the best I can.

February 14th, 2012

Been feeling really grateful lately. First, I got a letter from my grandma last night. Every time I get a letter from her, it makes me cry and puts things into perspective for me.

My strongest moments of emotional unrest were during the deeply cold months of January and February—which also happened to be the months when I needed to start deciding if I would stay another year in Japan or not. The school had formally asked me to stay and teach for another year, but the cold winter was dampening my spirits and making me long to go back home.

I am told now that the first year abroad is the hardest, and if you stick it out, the next year will be much more delightful and rewarding. I cannot confirm this as a fact as I

only stayed for one year. What I know to be true is that when I didn't experience culture shock upon first arriving in Japan in August, I kept expecting it to come. It never came during those first few months in Japan, so I assumed I was an anomaly who was above getting culture shock. Looking back now, I believe that first winter in Japan is when I first experienced a real bout of serious culture shock. I am telling you this because you may or may not experience culture shock when you are teaching abroad, and it might come when you least expect it, like it did for me. It is good to be aware of the symptoms of culture shock—feelings of disorientation and unrest—and to be able to train yourself to become more resilient.

In her article “Pipher’s Attributes of Newcomers’ Resilience”, Reeves (2004) interprets Pipher’s (2002) twelve traits of resilience within the ESL context. I would argue that these traits can also apply to the EFL teacher abroad. The EFL teacher who has even some of these qualities will be sure to have a more successful experience abroad than the teacher who has little or none of these. The twelve traits are as follows: 1) future orientation, 2) energy and good health, 3) the ability to pay attention, 4) ambition and initiative, 5) verbal expressiveness, 6) positive mental health, 7) the ability to calm down, 8) flexibility, 9) intentionality or being thoughtful about choices, 10) lovability, 11) the ability to love new people, and 12) good moral character (Pipher cited in Reeves, 2004, p. 3-5). When I was teaching in Japan, my strongest traits were 7), 10), 11), and 12). I was especially strong in 11)—the ability to love new people. I was always seeking out opportunities to make new friends and meet new people, and these friendships are a big part of what carried me during my year in Japan. One of the largest areas in which I was lacking was 1)—future orientation. I had a hard time knowing where my future stood.

Would I stay in Japan or would I go home? And if I went home, was I ready to jump straight into grad school, or would I need time to adjust to being in the states? Having a definite plan will certainly give the EFL teacher great peace of mind.

I have a friend who is currently teaching in Japan, and she writes a blog about her experiences. In this blog, she writes:

I sometimes get annoyed at being stared at. I have come to peace with facet of my life here and I understand that no matter what; I am a light-skinned-European-faced woman who sticks out like spilled red wine in white carpet (Riley, 2015, para 5).

One of the symptoms of deracination is this feeling of sticking out or being different and experiencing anomie (Okabe, 2008). Riley writes, “All the while I am an image of the unknown and the always noticed, however, I am still the invisible woman” (para 12). As a foreigner in Japan, you will notice a pendulum between being the adored foreign guest and the ignored outsider. Indeed, Riley goes on to say, “So while I am always in the limelight in some ways, I am totally invisible in others; and that is quite alright” (para 14). It is good for you to be aware of this contrast of emotions you might feel in Japan, and the most important lesson you can take away from this is to simply remain open-minded and accept the things you cannot change (Riley 2015).

Another way you can combat your feelings of unrest and deracination is through writing. As I mentioned, the moments when I felt the most homesick, I found myself writing in order to free myself from despair. In her article “Fear and Anxiety as Heuristics for Poetry Writing”, Reeves writes:

The newness had worn off. It finally dawned on me that I was totally alone there...I had cut myself off from all I loved, all I needed, all I knew. Suddenly, overcome with anxiety and emptiness, I began to write in my journal that night and almost every night of my first year teaching... They say you can't go home again, but they're wrong. No matter where you are or what you're facing, you can always go home again and feel the comfort of the fire in the stove on cold winter nights. You can go to your elders. You can visit the dead. You can run to the cottonwood tree and climb high into forgotten boughs. Your pen can take you there. (1993, p. 21)

Writing can be an extremely therapeutic tool, especially when you feel burdened (Okabe, 2008). Like Reeves, Riley, Okabe, and me, you too can practice positive mental health through writing.

XI. Group Dynamics and Discipline

At Muko-jo, I never witnessed any girls bullying other girls. There was no written zero tolerance policy about bullying like we have in the United States in many public schools. I interpret this to mean that there was no need for such a policy for these Muko-jo students, who were expected to hold themselves to a high standard. But there may have been an unspoken policy for the teachers because during my time at Muko-jo, one teacher was suspended temporarily for corporal punishment. I have certainly heard that bullying can be an issue in Japan, but it wasn't an issue at Muko-jo, probably because the students had been taught stellar behavior.

I did, however, experience moments of extreme discomfort when I witnessed teachers getting in students' faces and yelling. I remember walking past a teacher screaming at a student in the hallway. He was inches from her face and looked as if he was on the verge of losing control of his emotions. When I told Alex and Amy, they said that that was just the way the student-teacher relationship worked at Muko-jo.

On “Trash Day”—a day where the whole school gets together and cleans up the community as a group—we foreign guests were assigned to escort a group of Muko-jo students. Many of the girls were joyfully exclaiming their delight to be working with us. One girl even squealed, “Ah! *Gaijin* がいじん!” (“Ah! Foreigners!”). *Gaijin* is the informal and disrespectful way to say “foreigners”. The respectful term would be *gaikokujin* がいこくじん—international people. One of the teachers heard her say “*gaijin*” and got in her face to chastise her for a prolonged period of time. Though I could not understand the Japanese being spoken by the teacher, the tone made it very obvious that the lecture was meant to humiliate the student in front of her peers and the foreign teachers, including me.

I had never seen such severe discipline and chastising before in the states, so I was a bit taken aback any time I witnessed teachers berating students. Feiler’s experience in a Japanese school was very similar to mine. He writes:

One particularly ferocious teacher drew a short bamboo pole from his desk and ceremoniously slapped each boy on the back of the neck, like a Zen master rapping young monks to instill determination. The entire faculty body seemed to join in on the punishment. (2004, p. 43)

When Feiler asked his colleagues why they were so harsh in punishing the students, one of his colleagues replied, “‘*Shitsuke* (discipline) is the heart of our schools’ (p. 40). This idea of discipline being the heart of Japanese schools certainly coincided with my experience at Muko-jo.

XII. Letters to Grandma

One of the ways in which I tried to make myself more resilient was by writing letters to my Grandma. This would fall under Pipher’s fifth attribute: verbal expressiveness (Reeves, 2004, p. 6).

I knew that Grandma wanted the best for me and I didn’t want her to worry about me, so I decided to put my best foot forward and reflect on all my positive experiences when writing her.

Before sharing some of these letters, there is one important detail for you to note: my grandpa passed away during the year that I was in Japan. This was surely another factor that contributed to some of my mental unrest. You will notice that the letters start out addressed to both my Grandma and Grandpa, but after Grandpa passed, I continued to write Grandma.

The following is a letter I wrote to both Grandma and Grandpa. In this letter, I will interweave photos of the places and events I refer to in the letter.

Dear Grandma and Grandpa,

I've been wanting to write you a letter for some time now. I have so much I want to tell you! I figured I would reflect on all my wonderful experiences here, and tell you about them.

When I first got here, I went to Okinawa, which is like the Japanese Hawaii. I think I may have sent you pictures of the beach there, but if not, please let me know and I'll send you some. I squealed when I saw the water there because it is so crystal clear and a beautiful aqua in the distance. The beaches there are so beautiful and clean—it is incredible! Also, I got to reconnect with an old childhood friend that I haven't seen in years. Her husband is in the military, so they live there now. She was an excellent hostess, and I had a great time catching up with her.

Figure 33 is a photo of one of the beautiful Okinawan viewing places we visited. It is called "Cape Manzamo", and it is a famous point because it looks like an elephant.



Figure 33. Okinawa: Cape Manzamo

After we got back from Okinawa, school started. At first I was very nervous, of course, but the students were all **so** sweet! They call me Horando Sensei (it sounds like “Orlando” with an “H” when they say “Holland”). I have several students who come to my office during lunch or after school, just to talk to me. They are so eager to get to know me and to practice English—I’ve felt really loved here! They often bring me candies and other treats. Several students even made me little books for my birthday about me coming to Japan and how excited they were. They are so sweet! I’m really enjoying the lessons and the eagerness of the students, so overall I’m having a really great experience here with my new job.

Some other highlights of my time here so far have been all the times I've been able to catch up with my old students from MFWI in Spokane. They've been so excited to show me their country and I've tried all sorts of delicious foods and seen all sorts of beautiful sights and traditional places here. I've really enjoyed getting to spend more time with them.

In early October, I got to go to the hometown of one of my former students, Hiroko, and stay with her family for the weekend. I got to watch her hometown's "bringing in the harvest" festival. In this festival, boys from the neighborhood are chosen to dress as a "tengu" (a traditional monster-looking creature) and run through the town with fresh oranges. The children chase them, screaming, "Kudasai, kudasai!" which means, "Please, please!" and the tengu throw oranges to the children.

Figure 34 shows a tengu with some of the children and me.



Figure 34. Tengu and Children

When the tengu run out of oranges, they go from house to house collecting oranges (similar to trick-or-treating on Halloween). Then, that night, all the tengus come together and perform a traditional dance at the town's temple. I got to watch the dance, and afterwards, I even got interviewed by the town's local TV station!...in Japanese! So I made it on TV. ☺ Hiroko's family was so gracious to me all weekend too. They wanted me to experience traditional Japanese food, so the first day they taught me how to make sushi. I rolled my own rolls, and it was delicious! ☺ The next day, we made "Nabe" (pronounced "nah-bay"). To make Nabe, you first boil water in a big bowl that has a grill attached to it (the bowl stays on the table during the whole meal). Then you add vegetables and thin slices of beef or pork or other meats. Because the water has been boiling so long, the meat cooks super quickly. Then, you use your chopsticks and take out pieces of meat or vegetables—whatever you want—one at a time and dip them in different dipping sauces. It is so delicious! I especially liked the "ponzu" dipping sauce. ☺ Hiroko's grandmother showed us pictures from when she was our age, and overall they made me feel so at home. Do you have pictures from when you first met? I'd love to see some! ☺

Speaking of spending time with my former students, I recall they really made me feel special for my birthday. This was the first birthday I've had away from home. I was feeling a little sad I couldn't spend it with my family and friends back home like I always do, but then, it ended up being so special! The teachers in my grade bought me beautiful pink flowers for my birthday and it made me so happy. Then, as I mentioned before, some of my students brought me candies and homemade gifts. When I got home, my friend Amy (who lives below me and helped me get this job) asked me to come down to

her apartment. So I came down, and she and a bunch of my former students had a surprise birthday party for me! They had a bunch of food and even a birthday cake. We laughed and played card games, and had a great night. I ended up having three birthday parties that weekend, and a few more in the following weeks—I even had a surprise birthday party from a different group a month after my birthday. At that point, I wasn't expecting anything, so it was a wonderful surprise. I've never had this many birthday parties before in my life. They are so thoughtful and kind. 😊

Another really fun experience I had recently was visiting Arashiyama. It is a city just outside Kyoto, so it is very traditional looking and beautiful. When I first got there, we walked to the river. It is so beautiful with all the mountains in the background. I'll send you some pictures so you can see how beautiful it is. After that, we went to the "Monkey Park". It was actually a long hike up a mountain. It was so beautiful, and I took lots of pictures because I knew my parents would love to see how beautiful it was since they love hiking so much. When we got to the top of the mountain, we came around a corner, and there was a monkey just sitting there! To be honest, it scared me a little bit at first. We walked around a tree, and suddenly there were monkeys everywhere! We had been told not to look the monkeys in the eye or touch them, so I was already feeling a little nervous, and having that many monkeys around me, walking within inches of me, scared me a bit. Eventually though, I warmed up to them and even took some good pictures with them. I'll definitely send you some pictures.

Figure 35 is a photo I took of a cute monkey family sitting on a motorcycle in Arashiyama.



Figure 35. Monkey Family

After the Monkey Park, we went to dinner, and we followed that with ice cream from a famous ice cream shop that some of our students had told us about. I got a double scoop of black sesame and chestnut. It was so good! I wish we had flavors like that back home. I know Grandpa loves his vanilla ice cream, but I think that black sesame would give him a run for his money. ☺

I keep having fun adventures, so I'll tell you about more of my adventures in my next letter.

Love you!

Delaney

The next letter I wrote to Grandma described our class trip to Nagahama. Figure 36 is a photo of the first page of this letter.

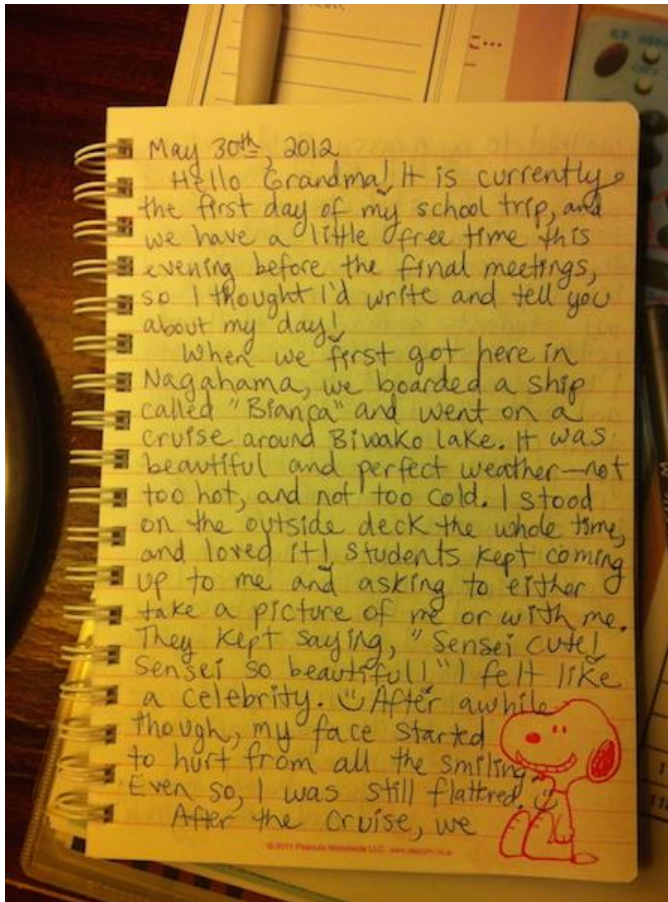


Figure 36. Excerpt from a Letter during a Class Trip to Nagahama

The following is the full letter typed up. As with the previous letter, I will interweave photos from our class trip within this letter.

May 30th, 2012

Hello Grandma! It is currently the first day of my school trip, and we have a little free time this evening before the final meetings, so I thought I'd write and tell you about my day!

When we first got here in Nagahama, we boarded a ship called "Bianca" and went on a cruise around Biwako Lake. It was beautiful and perfect weather—not too hot and not too cold. I stood on the outside deck the whole time and loved it! Students kept coming up to me and asking to either take a picture of me or with me. They kept saying, "Sensei cute! Sensei so beautiful!" I felt like a celebrity. ☺ After awhile though, my face started to hurt from all the smiling. Even so, I was still flattered.

Figure 37 is one of the photos I took of some of my students on the "Bianca".



Figure 37. Class Trip to Nagahama: Students Posing during the Biwako Cruise

After the cruise, we walked to a grassy field overlooking the lake. We ate lunch there, and some of the students wove flowers together into headbands and gave them to some of the teachers. When I put mine on, a few of my students screamed, “Holland is the most beautiful!” (Consequently, I had just taught them more/most and “er/est”, so I was impressed with their correct usage of most!) I also got a little embarrassed, but I suppose I’m used to them saying stuff like that now. ☺

Figure 38 is a photo I took of the beautiful flower headband my students wove for me.



Figure 38. Class Trip to Nagahama: Homemade Headband from my Students

Following lunch, we went to the “Lake Biwako Museum”. There I learned a bit more about the lake and the area. To begin with, we went to a lecture in English. While many of the students slept through the lecture, I think the English may have been too high level for them—I actually got something out of the lecture. ☺ I learned that Biwako Lake is the oldest and largest lake in Japan. And apparently I’ve been drinking Biwako’s water since I’ve been here because Lake Biwako is the main water source for the area in which I live, as well as several other areas.

When the lecture finished, we got to explore the museum. Of course I went

straight for the aquarium. I enjoyed seeing all the creatures that live in the lake—especially the turtles and the frogs. The frogs were some of the biggest I have ever seen! Speaking of big, I also saw some of the biggest fish I have ever seen (aside from sturgeon). I tried asking some other teachers and students what kind of fish they were, and they all said “sharks”. I wasn’t aware fresh water sharks existed, so this is definitely something I’m going to research when I get home. ☺

Figure 39 is a photo of some of my students posed in front of one of the Biwako “sharks”.



Figure 39. Class Trip to Nagahama: Lake Biwako Aquarium

After the museum, we drove to the hotel we are staying at. It is located at a different part of Lake Biwako, and the view from my floor (7th floor) is incredible!

When we first got to the hotel, we got to paint ceramics. We were each given a traditional Japanese tea cup to paint. I painted the kanji for “love” (“ai”) and the kanji for “peace” (“wahei”). I want to give it to my mom. ☺ And one of the teachers I work with gave me his cup to decorate, so I decorated one for my friend Amy, because her birthday is coming up in June and she works with me here.

We followed the ceramics with a delicious dinner, and after that I was told I could have an hour break until 9:30PM. So here I am now, and it’s almost 9:30! Our last meeting tonight starts at 11PM, and wake up time is 6AM, and those times are going to be the same the rest of this trip, so I’m a bit nervous about the lack of sleep.

Buuuuuuuuut...I’m excited to see what tomorrow’s adventures bring.

Signing off now.

Love you,

Delaney

As you may have picked up from my letter, one of the most shocking discoveries for me on my class trips was how little sleep both the students and teachers were provided. As you read, our final teachers’ meeting was at 11 P.M. each night. So I would usually be getting back to my room by about 12:30 A.M. or 1:00 A.M., and then we were woken up at 6:00 A.M. After the wake-up call, we would all gather on the field and do our morning exercises together. Figure 40 is an excerpt of a letter to Grandma from day 2 of this trip, and it describes the morning exercises.

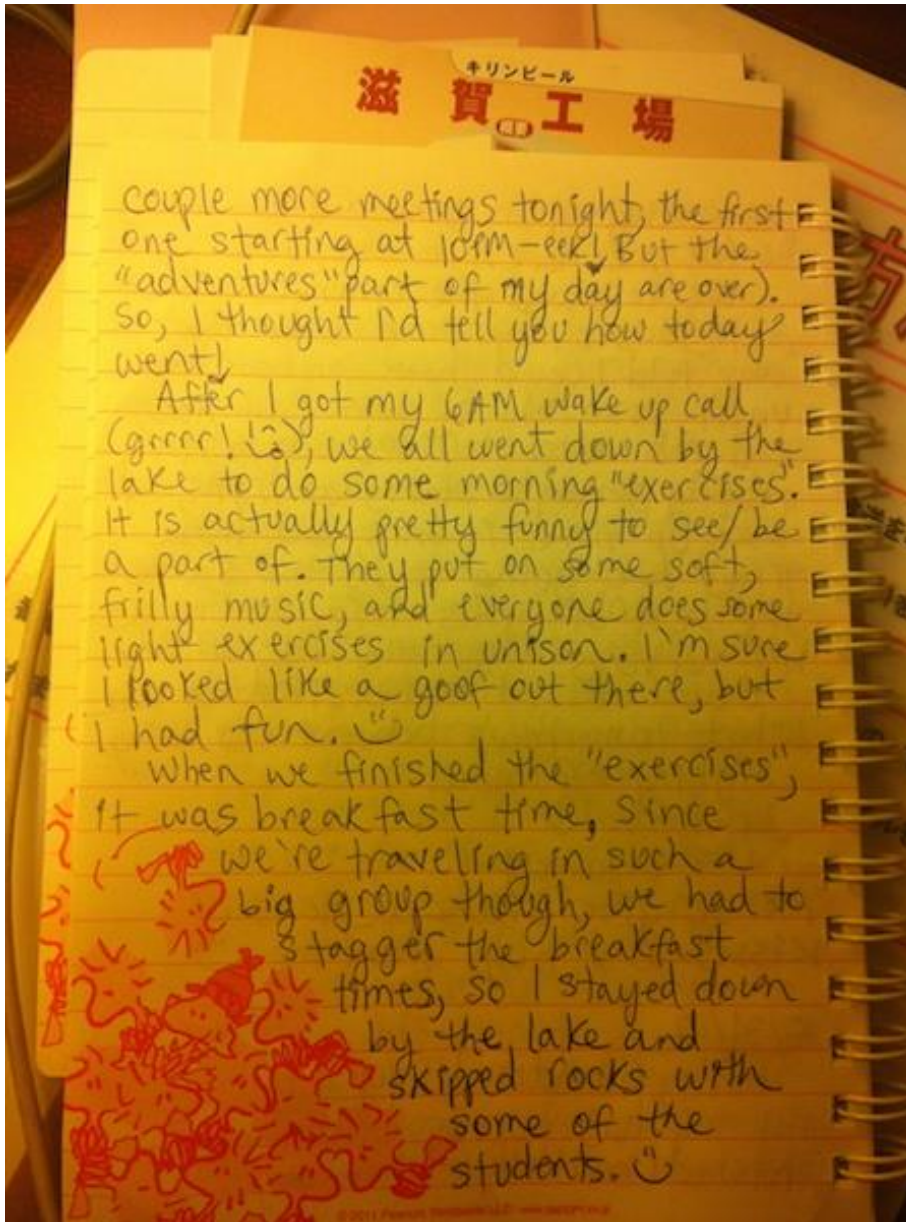


Figure 40. Excerpt from Letter of Day 2 in Nagahama

As you can see, I always tried to remain positive and reflect on my pleasant experiences when writing Grandma. This was my way of adhering to Pipher's sixth attribute of resilience: positive mental health (Reeves, 2004, p. 4). When you are teaching

overseas, I strongly recommend that you remain in contact with someone you care about who only wants the best for you. Simple as it sounds, I also advise you to spend some time reflecting on all the positive experiences you are having—especially when you feel as if you are drowning in negativity.

XIII. Life Outside of School

Another way I kept my sanity during my darker times was by meeting up with Japanese friends who wanted to show me their country. As you know, I had spent four years as a Resident Assistant (R.A.) at MFWI in Spokane, Washington. That means I had eight groups of 10-15 Japanese women who were eager to take me under their wings and show me their country, just as I had done for them in America.

On the weekends, I would meet up with various students, and they would show me different parts of Japan—fun restaurants, world heritage sights, beautiful scenery, etc. These former students of mine served as “cultural brokers” (Pipher, 2002) who welcomed me into their country. I was aiming for a mental balance between first time teaching and first time abroad, and these students helped me sustain my energy and my spirit.

I even did several homestay visits on the weekends, staying with some of my students and their parents. My first home visit was to a small town called Akashi-shi in Hyogo, Japan. The town was having its special “bringing in the harvest” festival, and I got to participate in all the festivities.

Figure 41 is a photo of Hiroko’s brothers and me trying on the traditional “happi” (the jacket for the festival).



Figure 41. Trying on the “Happi”

Figure 42 is a photo of the feast I ate with my student and her family—her mother and grandmother even taught me how to roll sushi. Some of the sushi you see on those plates was rolled by me!



Figure 42. Akashi: Our Feast

Another home visit that really impacted me was my stay in Hiroshima, Japan. I had a former student whose family lived there, and they graciously welcomed me into their home for a weekend. Upon arriving, the mother had a huge feast prepared for me, complete with tempura fried shrimp and vegetables, sushi, and other treats. The father also took me to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum the second day of my visit. I will never forget how heavy my heart felt while walking through that museum. When we left, I couldn't even speak to him for fear that I would cry.

Figure 43 is a photo I took of the delicious feast her mother prepared for my visit.



Figure 43. Hiroshima: Our Feast

Figure 44 is a photo I took of the A-Dome. It was difficult for me to even take a photo as I felt incredibly shaky and somber standing in front of a place that had witnessed such extreme despair and loss of life. I still feel my stomach drop when I look at this photo and remember all the lost lives I read about while touring the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.



Figure 44. “Genbaku Domu” (The A-Dome) in Hiroshima

One common trend in all my homestays was that I was fed like a queen and shown all the places that their hometown was known for. I was taken care of very well.

Of course, I have hundreds and hundreds of photos from my life outside of school in Japan, but I chose to share these because they really represent the warmth, love, and hospitality I was shown by my Japanese friends. When you teach abroad, it is important to find a Japanese friend or family to help you adjust to the culture. I strongly recommend you do this to maintain a balance in your psyche.

XIV. Saying Goodbye

When I made the decision to return to the states, I was asked to give formal farewells to everyone at the school. First, I went around to each of my eighth grade classes, explaining to the students that I was leaving in order to travel and to study teaching further. As I went from class to class giving my goodbye speech, many students' jaws dropped or their hands jumped to their mouths in shock. To my surprise, there were a lot of tears and gasps of disbelief. Though I knew from all the welcome gifts and sweet notes throughout the year that my students loved me, until this moment I hadn't fully realized how much they valued my classes as well.

In addition to the formal class farewells, I also gave a speech in front of the entire school. After all the speeches, students came and showered me with goodbye gifts. To this day, I have saved all the sweet notes I received when leaving Japan.

Figure 45 is a photo of one of these goodbye notes.



Figure 45. A Sweet Goodbye Note from a Grateful Student

Figure 46 shows another sweet goodbye note from one of my students.

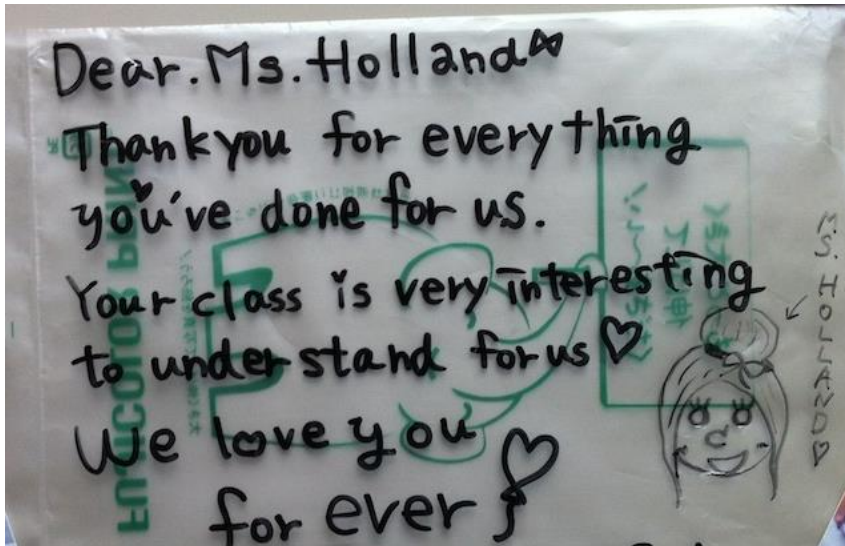


Figure 46. Another Sweet Goodbye Note

In addition to all the individual goodbye notes, one class even gave me a little booklet they made in which each of them wrote me lovely goodbye notes. If there is one memory I will take away from my time in Japan, it is all the warm, thoughtful, and generous people I was blessed to meet. My students made me feel loved, appreciated, and valued daily, and it is because of them that I decided to pursue an education in TESL. If you decide to teach EFL in Japan, be prepared for your heart to be filled and a bit overwhelmed by a showering of gifts from your students.

Figure 47 shows one of the notes from the booklet.



Figure 47. One photo from the Goodbye Booklet

Figure 48 shows another kind goodbye note from the booklet.



Figure 48. Another Photo from the Goodbye Booklet

Figure 49 shows a final photo of another note from the goodbye booklet. The actual booklet has around 30 thoughtful goodbye notes. As you can see, each note expresses immense gratitude and kindness. My students surely made me feel loved as a teacher.



Figure 49. A Final Photo from the Goodbye Booklet

Chapter 4

Discussion of and Reflections on My First Year of Teaching:

Nishinomiya, Japan

Chapter 4 is reflections on the autoethnography with a focus on frustrations, joys, and cultural gaps. It also includes a discussion of my initial assumptions and answers to the research questions. Again, I have followed TESOL's guidelines for ethnography:

Note that while ethnographic reports may present abstractions and generalizations about attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of the cultures under study, many ethnographers acknowledge and represent heterogeneity and diversity within the cultures or cultural scenes under study.

As I have tried to interpret these events and my responses to a variety of situations, I have come to a deeper understanding of the Japanese culture. I want readers to realize that their experiences teaching in Japan might be very different than mine because I was in a private girls' school. TESOL also asks us to "give evidence that [we] have interpreted the tensions implicit in the research with complexity and openness..."

(TESOL.org, 2015). It is my hope that I have captured the diversity within the student body and the faculty in my descriptions. Finally, in writing this autoethnography, not only have I learned more about Japanese culture while analyzing my experiences, I have also learned more about myself. As Rappel states:

Though the process of becoming self aware is primarily an individual endeavor, it is manifested in social environments, highlighting the importance of personal, relational and social contexts in transformative and authentic educational settings. In essence, a focal point of this approach to teaching and learning is the process of examining cultural attitudes and assumptions while recognizing embedded social realities. (2014, p. 15)

In order to learn more about my language teaching philosophy, I had to examine my experiences through different social contexts. I had to attempt to use a Japanese mindset to better understand my experiences. In autoethnography, a major part of the research method is reflection. As I reflect back on all my experiences in Japan, I cannot help but want to make a list of both the joys and the frustrations I experienced during my year. There was a fair amount of both joy and frustration, but I would like to consciously express and discuss each, in hopes that my experiences can benefit *you*, the novice EFL teacher, and inform you of any issues you might encounter should you follow in my footsteps in Japan.

Feiler (2004) summarizes quite well the pendulum of feelings I had throughout my year:

Others who have written about living in a foreign land have described the shifting moods of affection and disaffection the foreign guest feels—one day enamored with the host culture, privileged with the secret access to the heart of another world; the next day dismayed at always being kept away from its inviolable core (p. 11).

Like Feiler, my feelings were constantly changing. One day I felt like the privileged foreign guest whom every student adored, and another day I would feel like the outsider who wasn't fully accepted because I was *hakujin* (a white foreigner).

In order to end this discussion on a happier note, let us start with the frustrations, shall we?

I. Frustrations

A. Devalued?

One of my biggest frustrations was that I often didn't feel as if I was taken seriously as a teacher. In the first place, I was young—I was a freshly graduated twenty-two-year-old, coming to teach in a new country. I was also an American, so I was a foreign guest. Finally, I was a woman. All three of these factors directly affected my pay as well. Due to my age, gender, and nationality, I was paid the lowest salary of any of the teachers at the school—even teachers who taught the same number of classes as I did. But beyond the pay, at times I felt a bit devalued, and this bothered me the most when I felt I had something to contribute.

B. Suggestions

I remember making suggestions to some of my Japanese co-teachers for different ideas I had in the classroom, and several times my ideas were quickly brushed aside without a second thought. I also remember making suggestions for more efficient ways to complete tasks—such as having sign-up sheets for the teachers for holiday party setup and cleanup. Each teacher was assigned one task, but all teachers had to wait until all the tasks were completed, even though some tasks took longer than others. For example,

Amy and I would have to set up some lights, and that was it. After that we tried to help others with their tasks, but we ended up having “too many cooks in the kitchen.” Instead, we had to wait until everyone completed their tasks, even though some chores took more than an hour. I suggested we do sign-up sheets for the tasks so people could leave once their part was done, but I was told, “No, this is the way we do it.” Sometimes I wanted my voice heard more, and that was one of my biggest frustrations. In retrospect, I realize that they weren’t rejecting my suggestions, but they had an unspoken way of managing workload among themselves to maintain group harmony. In my American way, I valued efficiency, but now I realize that maybe they saw an American imposing her way on their way. What I now think I understand is that the teachers know this system, and I just didn’t know this unwritten system at the time. I was the *kohai* and they were my *senpai*. In Japanese practice, the *senpai* is the older, more experienced leader who takes care of everything, and the *kohai* is the younger, less experienced follower who does what she is asked (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). So it is highly possible that as my *senpai*, they wanted to lighten my load as a newcomer.

C. Isolation of Foreigners?

Along with this feeling of being a bit devalued, I also felt like an outsider due to the fact that I was foreign. We five foreign guests had our own separate office we shared in the Seminar building—a building a couple hallways away from the main office. In the main office, the Japanese teachers were all together in one large room with no walls and no cubicles. Perhaps this is an example of what Gudykunst & Nishida (1994) refer to as “collectivism”.

As I already mentioned, students often came to see me in the Seminar office, but at times I did feel a bit secluded and segregated from the Japanese teachers. Looking back now though, I realize I could have made more of an effort to go into the main office and get to know my fellow Japanese teachers. I believe now it is up to the EFL teacher to take initiative and try to get to know the local people. Even if you feel a bit isolated, it is possible that the local people are simply trying to be hospitable and give you extra space and privacy. I believe now that this special privacy is what was intended, and I incorrectly interpreted my situation at the time. It occurs to me that the Japanese might perceive we Americans as more individualistic, so they were trying to give us what they perceived we wanted—that is, more privacy in contrast to their collectivistic grouping in the main office.

D. Living to Work

Another frustration I had, which I touched upon in more depth in the autoethnography under section seven—“Living to Work”—was the feeling of being stuck at the office for so many hours every day without enough classes to prep. There was an unwritten policy that said that all teachers needed to be in the building from before 8:00 A.M. until after 5:00 P.M. daily. I found myself wishing that I either had more classes to teach or I could leave the office and explore Japan. I often felt rather stir-crazy sitting in that office, so I would often spend this excess time writing, skyping with friends and family from back home, or chatting with my co-workers. Occasionally I would go for a walk with Amy, but leaving the office for too long was frowned upon, so I had to keep my walks sparse.

E. Winter

The final frustration I had, which I also touched on in the autoethnography in section ten—“Darker Times”—was the mental unrest I experienced during the harsh, cold winter. My experience was pretty similar to Feiler’s (2004) experience: “My apartment, for example, had no heating, no insulation, no hot running water in the sink, and no overhead lighting” (p. 18). Much like Feiler’s apartment, there was a lack of central heating in my apartment, so I locked myself away in my room whenever I was home. Was I becoming agoraphobic?

In the mornings, I would leave my warm room, which had its own heater, and enter the cold brisk air that froze the rest of the apartment. There was no heat in my bathroom, so I would shiver and wait for the hot water to turn on. Then when I was ready for school, I would ride my bike to school in the frigid, wet cold. At school, there was heat in the individual offices and classrooms, but no heat in the hallways or the bathrooms. Walking to class was a very shivery and uncomfortable experience.

The cold bothered me so much that I never wanted to leave my apartment, particularly my room, outside of school. When I first arrived in Japan, I was making plans with all my former MFWI students and enjoying exploring all the beautiful places the country had to offer. But once winter hit, I hated the cold so much that I shut myself off from the world and stayed in my room.

As you know from my autoethnography, at the time I blamed Japan and thought I was homesick and longing for America, but really I think the cold alone was what was frustrating me. Be prepared for a harsh winter if you follow in my footsteps, and assess yourself and your mental health. What I didn’t do, that I wish I would have done, was

practice Pipher's sixth attribute: "positive mental health". Pipher defines this as "an optimistic nature, a sense of humor, and the ability to appreciate and enjoy what one can in the midst of sorrow" (Reeves, 2004, p. 4). I didn't take the time to stop and appreciate the positive moments in my life, because I allowed myself to be too overwhelmed by my frustrations with the cold. And don't forget, I wasn't allowed to put my hands in my pockets.

It is my hope that through reading my negative experiences, you can be stronger than I was and practice positive mental health.

II. Joys

A. Food

Much more long-lasting in my mind are the positive experiences I had in Japan. When someone asks me now about my time in Japan, one of the first memories that comes to mind is the food. It may sound a bit trivial, but my goodness was the food in Japan delicious! Never before had I tasted such fresh produce. Before going to Japan, I was nervous I would be eating raw fish and sushi for every meal, but I was sorely mistaken. Japan had foods from all over the world, and everything was prepared with such care and beauty. If you are worried about missing food from back home, worry not. The only items I missed were hamburgers (they make the beef patties differently in Japan), "Cool Ranch Doritos" (and pretty much anything "ranch"—they had no ranch dressing that I could find), and Mexican food. But everything else you can find there, and more often than not, it is even better in Japan. There are also import stores where you can find ingredients from back home and make the dishes you miss most. I am telling you,

worry not about food. You will be well taken care of in that department. In fact, I gained quite a bit of weight while living in Japan because I was trying all sorts of new foods and eating like a queen.

My favorite Japanese dishes were *kushi-katsu* くしかつ (fried items on a stick with delicious dipping sauces), *okonomiyaki* お好み焼き (a savory pancake filled with meat and cabbage and topped with delicious sauce), *takoyaki* たこ焼き (octopus fried in a breading with great sauce), and, of course, fresh sushi. I also loved Japanese Italian dishes. I had the most delicious garlic pastas while living there. And the Indian food in Japan was some of the best I have ever tasted—I wish I could find Indian food that delicious here in America. I even tried some cuisines I had never tried before—French, Spanish, and Vietnamese dishes. Everything was incredible.

Toward the end of my stay, I found a Mexican restaurant called “El Pancho” in Osaka, Japan. Though it wasn’t quite the same as Mexican food here in Spokane, Washington, it was still delicious in its own way. Of all concerns, food will not be a worry for you in Japan. You will eat like a queen.

B. Gifts

Another joy I experienced in Japan was all the material culture and gifts that were bestowed upon me. As I mentioned in my autoethnography, I felt constantly adored by my students as they brought me sweet notes and gifts throughout the year. In addition to my Muko-jo students, my former MFWI students often came to my house and showered me with gifts as well. For my birthday, one group of students heard that I love takoyaki and even bought me a takoyaki maker that I still have to this day. In my seven years of

experience with them, Japanese people are a loving, gift-giving people, and you can expect to be blessed continually with their thoughtfulness.

In addition to the physical gifts, my Japanese friends gave me the gift of their time. As I mentioned in the autoethnography, my former Japanese students went out of their way to welcome me to their country, showing me different parts of Japan that I surely would not have experienced without their friendship.

C. Trips

Some particular joys I experienced through my school, in addition to the adoring students, were the cultural experiences like the class trips. I never would have gone to or even heard of some of these places in Japan were it not for the school trips. During these trips, I was also exposed directly to some Japanese culture and mindsets that I couldn't see in school alone. For example, as you saw in section 13—"Letters to Grandma", I learned that sleep at night is not as much of a necessity to Japanese people as it is to American people. We teachers would have our last meeting at 11 P.M. and wake-up call was at 6 A.M., so I was averaging five hours of sleep a night during these trips—a bit difficult when I was accustomed to eight hours nightly. In fact, when I first noticed sleeping in public as a common occurrence in Japan, I went around and asked teachers and students alike how much sleep a night was normal to them. Nearly everyone said four to five hours—so different from the American standard of eight. I found this to ring very true during my class trips. Another cultural enlightenment for me were the morning exercises. During every class trip and even summer camp, we did daily exercises as a group together, waving our arms to flouncy music. I found this to be quite delightful, and something I would love to see in American schools.

D. Travel

Another great joy while teaching in Japan was that I was encouraged to travel and explore during my free time. As I mentioned, I spent most of my weekends adventuring and visiting new places in Japan. I saw many a beautiful World Heritage sight, tried all sorts of great new foods, and met wonderful Japanese people. But in addition to exploring Japan, I also got to explore various countries in Southeast Asia. During our first break from school, I went to Thailand. On the next break, I went to Bali. During the three-week summer vacation, I traveled throughout Malaysia and Cambodia. Traveling is a popular and well-accepted hobby in Japan, so my colleagues were happy for me and eager to hear about my adventures.

E. My Apartment

My apartment was another joy in Japan. Though I complained of the lack of central heating, I found that the positives in my apartment far outweighed the negatives. My apartment was a big, spacious place where I could host friends easily. In fact, my apartment in Japan was even bigger than the apartment I had in the states before moving. Muko-jo provided the apartment for me, fully furnished. All I had to do was pay rent, but it was wonderful that I didn't have to search for an apartment on my own, and it was wonderful that the apartment was a 10 to 15 minute bike ride from my school.

F. Pay

And finally, but well worth mentioning, was the joy of a generous paycheck. I was paid much more in Japan as a teacher than I would have been paid here in America. Thanks to all that money, I was able to travel and explore Japan much more than I would have without such a grand paycheck. In that regard, I did feel valued as a teacher—at

least I felt that my occupation itself was a respected one. When strangers in Japan asked me what my occupation was, they would “ooo” and “ahhh” and act genuinely impressed that I was a teacher. In the general public, you will surely feel respected as an EFL teacher in Japan.

III. Bridging the Cultural Gap

In this section, I will reflect upon the two most important lessons I learned while writing my story of teaching in Japan: cultural relativism and the value of writing. As Kehe and Kehe (2014) emphasize in their work, “Understanding that there are good reasons why cultures have the norms that they do can lead to a greater acceptance of the behavior of others that is unexpected or confusing” (p. 7). So it has been my goal to attempt to understand the experiences that were “unexpected” and “confusing” during my year in Japan from August of 2011 through August of 2012. This reflection has helped me put many events into perspective and has helped me to grow both as a professional and as a person.

A. Cultural Relativism

The first lesson I learned is the value of being open-minded and accepting of behaviors and thinking that are different from my own. I have to remember that my way is not the only way and be culturally sensitive which means realizing that a culture can be understood only through the lens of that culture and through experience with members of the culture (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Despite the fact that I had lived with Japanese in the United States for four years and had taught Japanese in Japan for another year,

those five years alone did not seem to teach me cultural relativism. In other words, only contact with a culture is not enough. One of the best ways to understand another culture is to reflect on these experiences in a systematic way after some time has passed. At the same time, one has to open her heart and be mindful of her lived experiences, be open to her “cultural brokers” (Pipher, 2002), and be intentional in the reflection. I can’t understand Japanese culture through an American lens—I can only understand Japanese culture through a Japanese lens.

The same is true in reverse. Japanese cannot understand American culture through a Japanese lens; they can only understand American culture through an American lens. They also need cultural brokers; in other words, someone from the culture to explain behaviors and thinking. Feiler (2014), for example, having lived in Japan for a considerable period, wrote, “Most people assumed that no matter how hard I tried, no matter how long I lived in Japan, I could never tolerate Japanese customs” (p. 12). He, however, exceeded their expectations and adapted well to using chopsticks, bathing nude in public baths, bowing properly, and understanding *senpai-kohai* relationships. Further, he explains that “...most Japanese believe that only they can understand Japan... ‘But we are one race,’ he insisted. ‘We are unique. Only a Japanese person can understand the heart of another. You can’t figure us out because you are a foreign guest’” (p. 12). And many Japanese say there is a national character, and that there will be common traits among the Japanese regardless of upbringing and region of one’s birth.

Whether we admit it or not, we impose an agenda on other cultures. For example, Miyahira (1991) asked Japanese people to describe the “ideal” North American and found:

This prototype is a person who is tolerant of silence, listens to others, is not too direct, keeps one's word, and does not dominate the conversation. The North Americans' prototype of an 'ideal' Japanese with whom they would like to communicate is a person who has a good sense of humor, favors confrontations, is not overly polite, is expressive, and is not unduly self-conscious. (cited in Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994, p. 82-83)

This survey shows the inclination we have of imposing our own cultural values on others, often unknowingly. In other words, Japanese just want Americans to be Japanese, and Americans want Japanese to be Americans.

Instead of imposing my way onto Japanese, I should have realized that sometimes what is not said is often more important than what is said. As Kehe and Kehe found:

For collectivists [Japanese], how a message is conveyed is what is of the greatest importance; they are apt to verbalize what they imagine the other person wants to hear, but to express their true thought, they might use non-verbal cues such as hesitation, breathing deeply, or even smiling. (p. 7)

As an American in Japan, I discovered that not only the words, but also the tone and feeling of the words are important in all communication. At the same time, the nonverbal behavior of Japanese often speaks more than the words. For example, the authors point out that it is very difficult for Japanese people to say no, so instead of saying no, they might say, "*Muzukashii* むずかしい ("It's difficult"). This is their way of saying no without being so direct and to save the face of the interlocutor as well as one's own face. All of the subtleties that I am describing here escaped me at the time, and as Gudykunst and Nishida explain "To understand people from other cultures, individuals must

cognitively manage their anxiety” (1994, p. 89). Writing this thesis two and half years later, put me in touch with many feelings that I had set aside as I reentered my own culture here in Spokane. Writing has been one way I have managed the anxiety I experienced at that time and during the composing of this thesis (Okabe, 2008).

B. The Value of Writing

The other major lesson I learned is the value of writing. In her article “Minimizing Writing Apprehension in the Learner-Centered Classroom”, Reeves writes:

In *Soul on Ice*, Eldridge Cleaver wrote, “That is why I started to write. To save myself...I had to seek out truth and unravel the snarled web of my motivations. I had to find out who I am and what I want to be.” (cited in Reeves, 1997, p. 38)

Writing can be a valuable tool and even therapeutic at times. As you saw in section 11—“Darker Times”, I wrote a lot during the times I was experiencing unrest in my psyche. I found that writing helped me release my frustrations. It also taught me more about myself and my values.

Reeves also speaks of being more reflective and looking within yourself to find meaning (p. 39). Though she is speaking of what we should teach our students, it is also something we teachers should practice: “We need to encourage positive self-talk” (p. 41). This reminds me of Pipher’s sixth attribute: “positive mental health”. One great way to practice positive mental health *is* through positive self-talk.

Reeves also talks about the courage we need in order to write: “It takes courage to write...There is a small voice saying, ‘What I have to say isn’t very important’” (1997, p. 44). You have to keep encouraging yourself through positive self-talk and realize that

your writing is a beautiful, valuable tool. Your writing can free you, and it can also teach you about yourself. If you free yourself and give yourself space to write, you may even end up writing something more beautiful than you could have ever imagined. I would like to close with a poem that Reeves wrote freely one day while she was writing with her students in Japan:

I want to disappear
into the cobblestone under my feet,
to go with the breeze to the mountaintop,
through bamboo groves, and down to the
river,
to become a vapor, a cloud, a moonbeam.
People would not see me
as the blue-eyed, “foreign” “ghost,”
but as part of them
like a maple leaf at Minoh Falls,
changing with the seasons:
salmon to horse blood,
horse blood to gold... (p. 44)

Any time you start to feel discouraged on your journey, I recommend you take your pen to paper and write those thoughts on the page. Your soul will be lifted and you will feel free.

IV. Addressing my Assumptions and Research Questions

“...instructors can model uncovering their assumptions, thus creating a safer environment for students to engage in critical thinking. (Miekley, 2014, p. 143).

As I already mentioned, TESOL requires researchers to disclose their assumptions. TESOL asks us to: “Practice reflexivity, a process of self-examination and self-disclosure about aspects of your own background, identities or subjectivities, and assumptions that influence data collection and interpretation” (2015). So it is very important that I address all of the assumptions I made prior to teaching in Japan. In addition, as Miekley states, disclosing our assumptions also creates a safe environment for our students, as it gives them a clear understanding of where we are coming from as their teachers.

While I have addressed these assumptions while weaving my story in Japan, I will briefly address each and answer whether or not my initial assumptions proved to be true.

A. Assumptions

- 1) Because I had been well prepared to teach English in secondary schools in the United States, I was well prepared to teach outside of the United States as well. It is true that because of my education and experience student teaching that I was well prepared to teach language and literature at the secondary level. I was also well prepared to manage a classroom. What I hadn't taken into consideration, however, were the cultural differences I would face in teaching in Japan, private versus public school differences, and the fact that I would be teaching at a girls only school versus a

co-ed school. I also hadn't had any ESL training prior to teaching in Japan, and I didn't realize that was something I might need.

2) Because I had lived with Japanese women who were undergraduate students from Mukogawa Women's University in Spokane for four years, I knew the culture well and did not expect many surprises.

While I did have contact with the culture for four years and I lived with Japanese women at MFWI, I was their RA, not their teacher, so I had a different kind of cultural experience than I might have had as their classroom teacher. In addition, I lived with 10-13 Japanese students at a time, whereas in Japan I taught 30-35 students at a time. Finally, it is possible that the students' behavior here in the states was different than their behavior might have been in their own country. The number of students I was interacting with here in the states was different, and the places and roles were different, so it was incorrect to assume I would have almost no surprises in Japan.

3) Because I was 22 and had lived away from home for four years, I would not experience homesickness in Japan.

Looking back, I am surprised that I assumed I would not experience any homesickness. Prior to teaching in Japan, I had never heard of anomie, the idea of not understanding the social norms, feeling uncertain, and not fitting in (Okabe 2008). So when I did start to experience anomie, particularly when I discovered the unwritten expectations of longer work hours and shorter holidays, it came as a surprise to me. Fortunately, my students' and friends' kindness counterbalanced this feeling of being lost. I also didn't realize how greatly the harsh winter would affect my psyche and

make me long for home. Finally, I didn't expect my Grandpa to pass away during the time I was overseas. I experienced quite a bit of homesickness when I realized I couldn't go home for his funeral and be with my family. All in all, my assumption that I wouldn't experience any homesickness proved to be wrong.

4) Because I was a new and inexperienced teacher, I would be mentored both formally and informally by the other Japanese teachers as is often the case in the United States.

Culturally, it seemed that their way of showing me respect was by giving me space and freedom to teach in my way. It is also possible that they may have perceived me as totally able and not needing help. In other words, maybe they thought I was well prepared and didn't need any extra help. Another possibility for not guiding me in lesson planning may have been an attempt to not burden me with extra duties and help me fit in. For example, they did not give me a lot of extra work such as inspecting the girls' hair length, skirt length, or the dress code in general. Another reason they refrained from giving me advice might be because they assumed that the native English speakers were mentoring me. Likewise, the native speakers may have assumed that the Japanese were mentoring me, and therefore no one did. They not only didn't coach me, but also didn't talk to me much, and my guess is that they were worried about their English communication skills and possibly feared miscommunication with a native speaker. Perhaps they feared being judged as incompetent. Finally, it simply may not have been the custom to mentor new teachers at this school. It has been important for me to realize that I can live without knowing

fully why any of this happened, but the reflection process has helped me grow and put the whole experience into perspective now that I have taught since then.

- 5) Because I have always been an optimist and have seen the glass half full, I had a reserve of resilience that would sustain me, despite any challenges or hardships that came my way.

I remained optimistic most of the time, but there were times when I became pessimistic. As I already mentioned, the winter made me very pessimistic, my Grandpa dying really brought down my spirits, and the unwritten expectation for me to be physically present in the school for longer hours than I was told made me question my optimism. I did have some resilience that sustained me for the most part, but there were times when this resilience wore very thin.

- 6) Because I had been told by colleagues at Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute (MFWI) in Spokane that the students would be quiet and reserved in class in Japan, I assumed I would have to pull them out of their shells and create learning activities that would help them communicate in English.

This assumption proved to be mostly true, but, as you saw in section nine of my autoethnography—“Multi-modality and Discussions”, I found ways to draw my students’ out of their shells, and they even exceeded my expectations at times.

- 7) Because of the long hours stated in the contract I would be working on school work and preparation almost around the clock, and I would have little time to get out into the community, meet Japanese people, and see the culture outside the classroom.

This assumption proved to be both true and false. It was true in the sense that I was expected to stay longer hours at school than my contract stated, but it was also false because all of my time outside of school was my own. As you saw in my autoethnography, I was constantly meeting up with my Japanese friends outside of school and exploring all the country had to offer. Even in school, I got to enjoy the culture outside the classroom during events like “Sports Day” and all the delightful class trips I got to partake in.

- 8) Because of media influence, I assumed that Japan would be mostly urban with high-density population and very little nature.

This final assumption proved to be extremely false. As I described our class trips in Chapter 3 and shared all my lovely photos, you can see that Japan was bursting with natural beauty.

B. Research Questions

- 1) What was it like to be a novice English teacher in a private junior/senior high school for girls in Japan?

This is a very broad question, but the answer is that it was mostly wonderful! My students were so kind, and their families and their school had enculturated them as good young women and shaped them to be such wonderful citizens. The experience was very different from my student teaching experience—I was in awe at how respectful my Japanese students were. It also gave me many opportunities to problem-solve on the spot.

- 2) What strengths did I bring to the classroom?

The greatest strengths I brought to the classroom were my friendliness and creativity. Thanks to my friendliness, I was able to build a good rapport with my students quickly. The girls also responded to my creativity and showed me their creative spirits, and I received a lot of material culture. I drew upon a knowledge of how to teach and create materials, and I found ways to incorporate fun language games into the classroom, so our time together was joyful and fun. Finally, I did my best to keep an open mind and accept other cultures, and I had a lot of energy to keep our classes fun and upbeat.

3) What were challenges—both cultural and pedagogical—that I faced?

I didn't experience many pedagogical problems that were not expected. As I mentioned, I expected my students to be a bit shy, and I expected to have to pull them out of their shells a bit, so that wasn't a challenge. The challenges were more cultural than pedagogical. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, one of the main challenges was having to be in the school building for so many hours and trying to find time to get out and see the country and the people. Another challenge I wrote about in Chapter 4 was wanting to do things more efficiently such as avoiding "too many cooks in the kitchen section".

4) What are some cultural issues that may have affected my teaching in Japan?

My response to this question would be all positive. In the U.S., I'd been trained to be very creative. Despite some initial cultural differences, this worked. One of my cultural strengths was that I came from a culture of teachers because my mother had been a teacher. My mother also brought me into the school where she taught—"The Oaks", so my Japanese students and I had similar backgrounds with the private school experience. We had many common values and our upbringings were similar, and this helped me

understand my students better. People might expect there would be these huge cultural gaps between my students and me, but in actuality there weren't many.

5) What did I learn and how did I change from this experience teaching in Japan?

While I was independent and resilient in my time in Japan, I learned I was more deeply attached to my home, family and friends than I thought. I also learned that I could handle difference, comply with what was expected of me, and make the best of my experience. In addition, I increased my passion for teaching because I was given the freedom to try out games and other creative activities in the classroom. Finally, I learned to appreciate these young women and learned that I had a desire to study EFL/ESL further.

6) What have I learned from teaching in Japan that other teachers or novice ESL teachers might benefit from learning?

The first lesson I would impart to you is: be flexible. If something is not working, try something new. Teach the curriculum you are given and do the best you can, but try to allow for some free time so the children can have some fun things to do with language too. Secondly, be culturally relative, realizing that your way isn't the only way. Thirdly, enter with an open heart. There is so much Japanese want you to know about their culture, even though they are shy. Fourthly, withhold judgment. Realize that teaching English in Japan is more like teaching French in the United States. It really is a foreign language for them—they can't walk out the door and speak English with someone. Some ESL strategies might not work in the same way with EFL, so be flexible and modify. Finally, realize that there may not be an official mentor assigned to you, so you should find someone and seek out advice. It's okay to reach out and offer to help someone practice English. Let someone take you under her wing.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: MATESL Experience and Beyond

Leaving Japan was a bittersweet time in my life. On the one hand, I was anxious to get back to a place that felt more culturally in sync with my own ideologies, and on the other hand, I had become a different person than the person who left the states to move to Japan in the first place. I was a bit worried about the culture shock I might encounter upon returning to America.

My decision to return to the states hinged upon two experiences. The first was to spend some time traveling to various countries and opening my mind to different cultures and experiences. The second was to attend grad school for Teaching English as a Second Language. I believed these experiences would better equip me to teach the ESL students I had grown to love, and they most certainly have.

Throughout my graduate studies, I studied various theorists and taught in various ESL classrooms, opening my eyes to different cultural perspectives. What follows is a compilation of some of the research that has influenced my own teaching philosophy these past two years.

I. An Examination of “Voice” and Identity in ESL Writers

In many countries, and especially in Japan, the ideal EFL teacher is a white American; which, as we know, is generally a monolingual English speaker. It is assumed that ESL students who are, of course, either bi- or multilingual, need a great amount of help from highly skilled monolingual English writers who only ever had to write in one language in the first place.

There are many issues that arise with ESL learners and writing, one of the biggest issues being writing apprehension. Daly & Miller (1975) define writing apprehension as “the tendency of people to approach or avoid writing” (Faigley, 2001, p. 16). In other words, writers with a high amount of apprehension will avoid writing at all costs because they experience a lot of anxiety in situations where they are required to write.

In addition to writing apprehension, many ESL writers experience a loss of “voice” or identity when they switch from their L1 (first language) to L2 (second language; namely, English). It makes sense that ESL writers would experience a loss of identity when they are writing in a language that is not inherent to them. There is often a fear that they don’t have the same “voice” or expression of “self” in the L2, since languages don’t translate perfectly into one another.

As an ESL teacher, I want to know how I can combat this anxiety and loss of identity with ESL writers.

Let us examine the concept of “voice” in writing from an American English standpoint, and determine whether “voice” is a necessary element in teaching writing to English language learners (ELLs).

There is a long history of the concept of “voice” in American English writing. Over the years, as beliefs about writing and the “self” change, teachers have debated whether or not to explicitly teach voice in the writing classroom. Peter Elbow (2007) describes this pendulum well in his article “Reconsiderations: Voice In Writing Again: Embracing Contraries”.

Elbow first describes the expressionist view where the goal of writing is to develop the self: “Everyone has a real voice and can write with power” (p. 168). He then

contrasts this with the social epistemic view that our voice is not our own, but we are socially constructed, or, as Elbow says: “we are written by our culture” (p. 168).

Whichever view you hold about who truly constructs the voice—the author or the society—there is clearly an idea that every piece of writing has some sort of a “voice” in it.

In defining the concept of voice, Elbow describes the “text” as the words on the page and the “voice” as the spoken medium of the language. He furthers this definition, saying that voice can refer to “how the same words differ, depending on who says them and how” (p. 175). When we write a string of words, both the specific words we choose and the specific order we place them in help to show our voice. For example, when looking at a scary building, I might describe it as “a dark, gloomy tower with an eerie feel to it”. Another person might describe it as “that creepy building”, and so on. Even though we each see the same building, we described it in very different ways, thus demonstrating our own unique voices.

This concept is best demonstrated in an example from Kramsh (1993). Kramsch describes a linguistic conference in which one of the speakers, Becker, decided to conduct an experiment before his presentation. Becker walked up to the stage and put his book on the podium, then asked the audience to each describe in writing what he just did in one sentence. After that, he had people share what they wrote. Some people referred to Becker as “a linguist”, “the man”, “you”, or “he”. Some said Becker “put”, “slapped”, or “placed” the book on the podium. Some used the simple past and said that Becker “stepped onto the stage” while others used the past continuous and said that he “was walking up the steps”.

Even though they all saw the same event, they each described it very differently. Kramersch said that this exercise “demonstrates that every writer has available a variety of choices for conveying a message” (p. 489). In other words, we all have multiple choices for which words to use and how to use them. The words we use along with the order we place them in help establish our own unique voice.

Eventually, Elbow concludes that “voice” in writing refers more to style. He implies that a pleasing style of writing will create a pleasing voice for the reader: “When readers hear a voice in a piece of writing, they are often more drawn to read it” (p. 176). He uses this as one of his arguments that we should teach voice in writing: “With practice, people can learn to write prose that ‘has a voice’ or ‘sounds like a person,’ and, interestingly, when they do, their words are more effective at carrying meaning” (p. 176). In other words, if we write in a way that people can “hear” our writing, we will be more effective at conveying our message. This is all fine and good, but how can ESL writers accomplish this? And should we ask them to?

Some, such as Leki (2008), would argue that we should not. In her article “Meaning and Development of Academic Literacy in a Second Language”, Leki argues that teaching voice is not an essential component in ESL reading/writing classes (p. 337).

As I mentioned in the literature review, Leki points out that being “literate” varies from culture to culture. In America, we consider academic literacy as being able to think critically and defend one’s beliefs in writing using clear logic. Other cultures define academic literacy very differently. For example, one aspect to being academically literate in Chinese is “having knowledge of thousands of characters and enough familiarity with the works of writers of antiquity to be able to quote them without hesitation in certain

contexts” (p. 330). Clearly this concept of academic literacy is not at all what we consider academic literacy in English, yet it is very valid in Chinese. The same goes for other cultures. In Japan, for example, an academically literate writer will only hint at the message and leave it up to the reader to determine meaning, whereas in America, it is the writer’s responsibility to clearly convey the meaning and the message of the text (Leki, 2008, p. 335).

Leki calls it an arrogance to believe that “because at this moment in time we feel that a critical approach works well for us, we must require it of every student that comes our way, not as an option but as the only appropriate form of intellectual engagement” (p. 336). She continues this train of thought, arguing that just because we in America have a cultural bias towards critical thinking, does not mean we should expect nor require our ESL students to write in the same manner. She argues that this includes “voice”, and we need not teach it to our ESL students since the concept of “voice” in writing is coming from an American bias in the first place.

Leki describes a Chinese graduate student, Shen, who was studying American literature and having trouble with his writing. According to Shen, his professor told him to stop worrying and “just be himself”. Shen realized that he couldn’t really be himself in English because “when he was himself, he was Chinese, and when his real Chinese self wrote something, it was not what his American professors were looking for” (p. 332-33).

In the same vein as Shen, Amarjit Chandan (1994), an immigrant from Nairobi who now lives in London also felt this loss of identity in writing in English. In his article “Writing in a language you cannot fully inhabit”, Chandan writes:

I was made to learn English at the young age of six. But even today, when I have to speak in this language, first I think in Punjabi and then translate into English. While uttering English words I always feel that something is being lost—it's not what I intend to say...(p. 83).

This quote from Chandan's article demonstrates that feeling that multilingual people have when they try to express their thoughts and feelings in different languages. There is a frustration when the words don't transfer over perfectly or have the same meaning they have in one's native tongue. This frustration at the lack of perfect translation can come with a frustration at losing one's identity. We express ourselves with words, so if we cannot use the exact words we want, how can we fully represent ourselves?

When working with Japanese students at MFWI, I asked my students their greatest fear in writing. In addition to the fear of making mistakes, they said that they felt they didn't have enough vocabulary to say exactly what they wanted to say in English. How can one express her own unique voice if she doesn't have the proper vocabulary or language to do so?

Much of Leki's argument in regards to voice in writing boils down to whether or not we should expect ESL learners to write in the same manner in which we expect native English speakers to write. As she says, it is arrogant to think that just because critical thinking is the current academic standard in America that all students should write this way.

Leki's argument is that we should respect other cultures, listen to our ESL students' views on writing, and have a wider acceptance of what we consider to be "academic".

She is basing her argument on the fact that this concept of “critical thinking” is culturally bound, so it behooves ESL teachers to get to know each of their students’ cultures and how writing is viewed within each culture.

She calls on ESL teachers to consider the fact that some of our students might not even practice essay writing, or other similar forms of “academic” writing, within their culture. As Leki points out, in America there is a heavy bias toward individualism, so we encourage our writers to disclose their personal opinions. However, “not all cultures encourage young people to self-disclose in classrooms” (p. 337). Because of this, Leki thinks we shouldn’t require ESL students to practice a writing style that doesn’t fit within their cultural views of academic literacy.

Toward the end of her article, Leki writes “it is difficult to understand cross-cultural literacies without first examining the assumptions of our own L1 literacy and then being willing to challenge or suspend the values tied to it” (p. 340). This basically sums up her argument: we need to re-examine our own views of literacy before trying to make our ESL students conform to those views.

I agree with Leki that we need to re-examine our own biases and take those into consideration when we teach writing.

But when it comes to the concept of “voice” in writing, I think Leki’s argument weakens. Instead of questioning whether or not we should teach voice, we should question what we mean by “voice”. Perhaps a new definition for voice is needed within the ESL lens.

As I have already mentioned, Elbow defines voice as the style within the writing: that internal “voice” you hear when you read a piece of writing. Within this definition, a pleasing voice equates to a pleasing style of writing.

If we define voice in this manner, voice seems like a relatively impossible goal for ESL learners to achieve. How can one write in a pleasing style when that language is not native or natural to him?

I speak and write a small amount of Japanese, and when I do, the last thing I’m thinking about is my “style”. All I’m thinking about is getting the message across that I want to get across, and that is because I am an intermediate Japanese learner. Someday, when I am more fluent in Japanese, perhaps I will start thinking about my “style” in writing, but right now, I consider my “voice” the message I am trying to relay. Regardless of my style, my voice and identity stem from the message I am communicating.

I am proposing that we broaden the definition of “voice” to mean more than just style and to include message. As ESL teachers, we can encourage students to focus on their message and this is, in effect, their voice. The message is what they want to say, so in that way it is representing themselves or their “voice”.

If we emphasize that the message is conveying their voice, we can mitigate that loss of identity they feel in going from their L1 to their L2. Perhaps emphasizing this change in focus and definition will also give them confidence in their writing so they feel less anxiety or apprehension toward writing.

After students have clearly conveyed their message, *then* we can help them with their style, but first we should make sure they are in fact saying what they want to say.

In fact, if students focus too much on style, sometimes their message won't be properly conveyed. Later in his article, Elbow (2007) shares some counter-arguments that voice (again, defined as "style" by Elbow) should *not* be taught in writing courses. Elbow shows how the voice can distract or take away from the message: "If students are going to learn how to read critically, they need to understand that voice will often mislead them" (p. 180). He goes on to describe how the notion of "voice" actually "tricks many students and would-be writers into believing that, if they can achieve "their own unique voice," they will, by definition, be good writers" (p. 183).

If we emphasize the importance of voice as style in our ESL classrooms, our students will likely be more focused on finding their own voice/style/identity in writing, rather than on conveying their message. Because of this, their message will not be clearly delivered. And, by default, their "voice" or "identity" will have been lost as well.

As Elbow points out later, "if writing teachers emphasize only voice or emphasize it too much, they tend to mislead students into thinking that good writing requires only voice (especially "your own" voice)" (p. 181).

We want to emphasize *message*, and explain to the students how the message itself reveals their personal voice and identity.

In conclusion, I would like to share a quote that stems from Elbow's historical analysis of the changing concepts of "voice": "this self was continually made and re-made by language" (p. 170). Even though this quote is taken out of context, it is actually very applicable within the ESL lens. We have to remember that our students are going from one language to another and most likely feeling like they have different identities in

each language. Something that would be simple for them to convey in their native tongue might be extremely difficult for them to convey in English.

As ESL writing teachers, we have a responsibility to be compassionate with our students and help them say what they want to say in writing. We have to remember that their identity in English does not necessarily reflect their identity in their native language. Perhaps they are an excellent writer in their own language, but they struggle greatly with writing in English. We have to remember that English is their *second* language and do our best to help them properly convey their message. Once their message has been properly delivered, they will begin to gain their identity in English.

II. Revisiting my Teaching Philosophy

When I first began teaching in Japan, there were several factors that shocked me: feeling devalued as a teacher simply because I was foreign, students sleeping in class, teachers sleeping in staff meetings, lack of communication to foreign teachers like myself, lack of any teacher prep program, and so on. At the time, I was very “America-centric” so to speak, and I thought that part of my job in Japan was to change the way “they” did things, particularly when it came to education. Now that I have returned to the states and have studied various theorists of both contemporary rhetoric and applied linguistics, I have begun to open my mind to what is “acceptable” in the classroom. Four particular theorists greatly influenced my teaching philosophy during my last quarter in the MATESL program at EWU: Mary Louise Pratt, Suresh Canagarajah, Gloria Anzaldua, and Robert Kaplan.

In the first place, Mary Louise Pratt’s works inspired me to be more aware of cultural differences and power struggles within my own classrooms. Her article *Arts of*

the Contact Zone introduces the idea of “contact zones”—areas where different cultures meet and clash. These contact zones can easily occur in the classroom. One of the main results of the contact zone is that there is always an oppressor and an oppressed. Pratt argues that in the classroom, teachers are often the oppressors, and the students are the oppressed. As Pratt says,

Teacher-pupil language, for example, tends to be described almost entirely from the point of view of the teacher and teaching, not from the point of view of pupils and pupiling [...] whatever students do other than what the teacher specifies is invisible or anomalous to the analysis. (p. 38).

In other words, the teachers or “oppressors” call all the shots, and the students have to silently submit to their authority. This rings all too familiar to the idea that history is written by the victors—the classroom is usually “written” or dictated by the teachers. This means that often the student voices and perspectives remain unheard. Instead, the teacher or “oppressor” controls what is retold. Pratt goes on to argue:

What is the place of unsolicited oppositional discourse, parody, resistance, critique in the imagined classroom community? Are teachers supposed to feel that their teaching has been most successful when they have eliminated such things and unified the social world, probably in their own image? Who wins when we do that? Who loses? (p. 39).

Here, Pratt is arguing that instead of oppressing our students and basically filling their heads with everything we think they should know, we should give them a chance to speak up so we can hear different voices and perspectives in our classrooms. Our students can teach us too.

Pratt's arguments take on a very "Foucault-esque" view that power shapes our perspectives of truths. In other words, those in power (in this case, teachers) tend to dictate the common views held by everyone (in this case, the students).

When we oppress our students and suppress their voices, often they will strike back. Kachru (1997) refers to this fighting back as "Caliban's Weapon". Caliban was a mythical creature in Shakespeare's "The Tempest" who was colonized and forced to learn English, then used that very English as a weapon to strike back against his oppressors. Often the attempts of a country to colonize another country and create one monolingual language just end up creating more varieties of that language. In the case of the classroom, it follows that the attempts of the teacher to "colonize" or suppress the students often just creates more dissonance.

In Pratt's view, the way that the oppressed respond to the oppressors in the contact zone is called transculturation. Many times in transculturation, "A conquered subject [is] using the conqueror's language to construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror's own speech" (p. 35). Again, this is a clear example of Caliban's Weapon. To further the concept: "While subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for" (p. 7). So while the students can't control what the teacher is enforcing on them, they can control what they choose to remember and use.

Other theorists offer rhetorically strategic ways for ESL students to bring their L1 (first language) back into the classroom and into their papers. bell hooks refers to this as "talking back" and Canagarajah refers to this as "code-meshing". As teachers, we should

encourage our students to bring their L1 into the classroom, instead of forcing them to speak and write in English only at all times.

Pratt also refers to “the imagined community” in her article. She claims that we have these imagined communities that we are homogeneous when really we are not. Even if we are all 18-year-old white females living in Spokane, Washington, we are still not homogeneous in our ideas and our experiences. We all come to a text differently. Therefore, a text will read *very* differently to people in different positions in the contact zone.

Pratt and her colleagues decided to embrace the contact zones and created a course for students from very diverse backgrounds. According to Pratt,

Every single text we read [in this course] stood in specific historical relationships to the students in the class, but the range and variety of historical relationships in play were enormous [...] one had to work in the knowledge that whatever one said was going to be systematically received in radically heterogeneous ways that were neither able nor entitled to prescribe. The very nature of the course put ideas and identities on the line. (p. 39).

Because this class was bursting with these contact zones, there was always going to be some misunderstanding or someone who was offended. As Pratt states:

“Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning—these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone” (p. 37). So, if there are all these negative effects that result from the contact zone, why would someone intentionally create a course filled with various contact zones? The answer comes at the end of Pratt’s article: “Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there

were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom—the joys of the contact zone” (p. 39). Like Pratt, I want to create an ESL classroom in which my students leave the class having been exposed to various cultures and also having their own cultures and identities affirmed and validated. In addition to teaching my students, I want them to know that they can teach me, and each other, as well.

In addition to Pratt’s insights on cultural clashes within the classroom, Canagarajah (2006) has influenced me and opened my eyes to the notion that I do not own the English language. English is a living language, and it is constantly changing due to political, social, and other cultural factors. Revering one version of English as the standard runs the risk of claiming ownership of the language when really people all over the world speak variations of English that are just as acceptable. As Canagarajah states, “every time teachers insist on a uniform variety of language or discourse, we are helping reproduce monolingualist ideologies and linguistic hierarchies” (p. 587). Instead, “English should be treated as a multinational language, one that belongs to diverse communities and not owned only by the metropolitan communities” (p. 589). We are so often trying to promote one English that we have ownership over, instead of accepting and valuing the varieties of English we see everywhere in the world.

Canagarajah mentions the obvious flaws in promoting monolingualism: “a classroom based on “standard” English and formal instruction limits the linguistic acquisition, creativity, and production among students” (p. 592). Instead, we should value the students’ own languages.

Canagarajah points out that multilingual people are constantly negotiating meaning together. Instead of correcting each others' English, they are patient and tolerant of each others' "mistakes". They find creative ways to use English and understand each other. We monolingual speakers should have more patience and tolerance for multilingual speakers' English. Canagarajah gives several ways in which we can do this, and all of his ideas stem from finding unity in diversity (p. 594).

One way in which we can give our multilingual students more of a voice is by "appropriating English according to the preferred interests and identities of the speaker" (p. 588). He points out that this not only gives the students voice, it is also "the most effective way for developing proficiency in that language" (p. 588).

Another way we can validate our multilingual students in the classroom is "we should perceive "error" as the learner's active negotiation and exploration of choices and possibilities" (p. 593). Again, this is the idea that our students can negotiate for meaning and find creative ways to say what they mean to say. When it comes to world Englishes, Canagarajah states:

If each of us can acknowledge that we are novice speakers of the other's variety, we will make efforts to develop competence in it...without expecting the other to defer to our own variety as the universal norm. (p. 590).

Again, this means that we should respect other varieties of the languages we speak, instead of claiming ownership of English.

A final way that we can support our multilingual students is by seeing their home/first language as a resource, rather than a hindrance (p. 593). Canagarajah speaks of STROL (Students' Right to Their Own Language) and mentions that students should

have the right to use their vernacular for formal purposes (p. 596): “They have to not only master the dominant varieties of English, but also know how to bring in their preferred varieties in rhetorically strategic ways” (p. 598). He concludes with the suggestion that minority students should get to see their own variety of English written in academic texts (p. 599). I agree with Canagarajah that my ESL students should see their own cultures, languages, and identities affirmed and validated in my classrooms. Instead of fighting against them, I will fight with them and help them to find these rhetorically strategic ways to incorporate their L1’s in the classroom.

Gloria Anzaldua (1987), a bilingual Spanish-American, was a victim of this common trend of teachers who insist on monolingualism in the classroom. In her book *Borderlands*, Anzaldua states:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for “talking back” to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. (p. 53).

This oppression of her L1 continued into Anzaldua’s college years: “my mother [was] mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents” (p. 54). For almost all of Anzaldua’s life, teachers were trying to rid her of her Spanish and her Mexican identity.

But, like Caliban, Anzaldua rose up against her oppressors and found a way to use her L1 and English simultaneously. As I mentioned, often the attempts of the oppressors to create one monolingual language just end up creating more varieties of that language.

As Anzaldua states: “But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally...Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language...Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos’ need to identify ourselves as a distinct people” (p. 55).

Again, we see Caliban’s Weapon: the colonized rising up and using the very language being enforced on them as a weapon and striking back against the dominance.

In Anzaldua’s book, she is arguing for a new identity—one who accepts both her Spanish and English identity. She states: “The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity...She learns to juggle cultures” (p. 79). I will encourage my multilingual students to embrace all of their cultures, identities, and languages, and find ways to bring them into the classroom.

The final theorist who greatly influenced my teaching philosophy this quarter was Robert Kaplan. Kaplan (1966) first introduced the term contrastive rhetoric. Contrastive rhetoric is the idea that different cultures have different patterns of thought that are reflected in their writing. In other words, different cultures have different rhetorical tendencies. Connor (2002), the theorist who organized Kaplan’s thoughts on contrastive rhetoric into a book, states: “Writing is culturally influenced in interesting and complex ways” (p. 495).

Kaplan argues that ESL teachers are “late-comers” in the area of international education and therefore need to be more aware of the different methods with which to teach English. His argument is that it is important for both the teachers to be aware of the dominant rhetoric used in their students’ cultures, *and* for the students to be aware of the dominant rhetoric used in Western writing. In this way, the teacher will know best how to teach academic English to these various students. As Kaplan states:

In the teaching of paragraph structure to foreign students, whether in terms of reading or in terms of composition, the teacher must be himself aware of these differences, and he must make these differences overtly apparent to his students.

In short, contrastive rhetoric must be taught in the same sense that contrastive grammar is presently taught. (p. 20)

The biggest benefit of contrastive rhetoric is that it increases cultural awareness. It can help both the teacher and the students understand cultural differences in writing and can give both parties a sense of “where the other person is coming from”. It also gives students an opportunity to analyze and compare how they write in their L1 versus how they are expected to write in English.

When I first started teaching Arabic writers, we actually talked about the rhetoric used in academic English writing versus the rhetoric used in other languages, including Arabic. I explained that in English we move from point to point, and we like every sentence to relate to the topic of the entire essay. I explained that we see this as “linear”, and drew a line on the board. Then I asked my students how they write in Arabic, and they said, “The same!” That, of course, made me think. It made me realize that we all view our own writing as “linear and logical”, because, as Kaplan says, “logic per se is a cultural phenomenon as well” (p. 12). What I view as linear and what my students view as linear is very different indeed.

Therefore, one downfall of contrastive rhetoric is that it can give people a superiority complex. I may think that English academic writing is the most linear and straightforward, and therefore the best. On the other hand, my students may think that their Arabic writing is the most logical and straightforward, and therefore the best. It is

nearly impossible to agree upon which is a better form of writing when we are both coming from completely different perspectives.

I think the best way to approach contrastive rhetoric in the classroom is to analyze different pieces of writing in English (from writers of various L1's), and discuss the differences and similarities we see. I particularly like Kaplan's example of giving students a scrambled paragraph and asking them to re-order it in what they deem the most logical fashion. I actually did a similar activity with my students at the beginning of this quarter, and it was really interesting to see how their minds worked. Like Kaplan, I agree that Arabic writing is not better or worse than Western writing, it is just different. As Kaplan says, "It is not a better nor a worse system than any other, but it is different" (12).

Overall, my teaching philosophy has broadened as a result of my TESL graduate studies here at EWU. Thanks to Pratt, I will be more aware of cultural differences and identity issues in my classroom. Thanks to Canagarajah and Anzaldúa, I will be more accepting of different varieties of English in my classrooms, and I will encourage my students to bring their L1's into the classroom. Thanks to Kaplan, I will be sure to analyze different rhetorical perspectives with my students. My classrooms will be a safe space where different cultures can meet and enlighten each other.

III. Final Thoughts

So now you have read my thesis and have a small taste of what it might like to teach at an all-girls' private middle school in Nishinomiya, Japan. My strongest advice for you if you choose to take a similar journey is to consciously keep yourself from being

ethnocentric. Don't fall into the mindset that your way is the "right and only" way.

Instead, try to practice cultural relativity:

Being culturally relative involves recognizing that the behavior of members of other cultures can be understood only in the context of their culture. If individuals try to understand the behavior of members of other cultures using their own culture's standards, they will inevitably misinterpret the behavior. (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994, p. 90)

As you saw in my autoethnography, I was not culturally relative when I interpreted what I perceived to be strange behavior in Japan. Instead, I was very America-centric and thought I needed to conform my students and colleagues more to "my way". It is highly possible that if I had practiced cultural relativity, I would have been far less offended in certain situations, and I would have had less frustration and culture shock. I also might have been more empathetic and understanding of the people around me and therefore had a more positive experience overall.

Sitting in my office chair, flipping through photos and sweet notes from my students and remembering all the grace and love I was shown in Japan, I cannot help but smile. My heart is full with the sweet memories. Yes there were both frustrations and joys throughout my year, but my greatest take-away is the joy. Would I do it all again? Yes. Yes I would. In fact, I should have stayed for the second year that I was offered. And you should too. I wish you well on your teaching journey in Japan, and I hope my story has made you feel more ready for what is to come. All my best.

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EDUCATION

Masters of Arts in English: Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)
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Thesis: “Don’t Wake Me, My Desk is Far Too Comfortable”: An Autoethnography of a
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GPA: 4.0

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CERTIFICATIONS

Teaching Certificate: English Endorsement

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, English Language Institute

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington (2015-Present)

Spring 2015

Reading 2

Taught a reading course for beginner ESL students. The course focused on vocabulary building and reading skills such as scanning, skimming, and getting meaning from context. Also provided additional short stories and created engaging activities in an attempt to demonstrate reading for pleasure.

Grammar 2

Taught a grammar course for beginner ESL students. The course focused on pronoun use and verb tenses, specifically simple present, present progressive, simple past, and simple future. Created enjoyable activities to help students practice proper grammar usage, such as spelling competitions for irregular verbs, circle activities where students had to repeat the sentences the people said before them, and so on.

Winter 2015

Reading 3

Taught a reading course for intermediate ESL students that focused specifically on vocabulary building and reading. With each reading, students had to study target vocabulary. Created activities such as sentence building to help students learn the target vocabulary. Also created activities to help students find the topics and main ideas for each paragraph in the readings.

Writing 3

Taught a writing course for intermediate ESL students that focused on writing a paragraph. Designed the course around three types of paragraphs: descriptive, narrative, and expository. Created daily free writing prompts to instill a habit of writing in the students.

***Alternate Graduate Assistant, Department of English* Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington (2013-2014)**

English 101 College Composition: Exposition and Argumentation

Substituted in English 101 courses. Introduced students to different forms of writing, including argumentative, informative, and personal essays. Taught students brainstorming, free-writing, revision, and peer review techniques. Helped students understand the importance of organization, development, support, and focus in writing.

Intern, Department of English Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington (2013)

English 112: Composition for Multilingual Students

Led and wrote weekly journal prompts with the ESL students. Held weekly writing conferences with a group of students. Taught the whole class several times throughout the quarter. Developed curriculum for teaching writing to ESL students.

English Instructor Mukogawa Women's University: Junior High and High School, Nishinomiya, Japan (2011-2012)

Eighth Grade English Courses

Taught ten eighth grade classes, which included eight "Intelligence English" (IE) classes and two "Super English" (SE) classes. The IE courses were designed for average level English learners, and the SE courses were designed for advanced English learners. IE courses focused on listening and reading, while SE courses focused on conversation, pronunciation, and writing.

Tenth Grade English Courses

Assisted in a tenth grade English course. Provided help with pronunciation. Led and proctored various listening activities. Answered all questions about Standard American English.

Student Teacher

Mt. Spokane High School, Mead, WA (2011)

English

Acted as full time instructor for two sophomore English classes. Created and instructed two consecutive units: *Animal Farm* (the course book) and Poetry. In the *Animal Farm* unit, students were encouraged to discuss and debate the motives of the pigs. All discussions led up to the final project of the unit: a persuasive paper indicating whether or not it was possible for *Animal Farm* to reach a utopia. Other options for paper topics related to *Animal Farm* were provided as well, so students could write persuasively on a topic of interest. In the Poetry unit, students learned different poetic terms and types of poetry. The unit culminated in students delivering a presentation on a researched poet of their choice. Created all lessons, prompts, and rubrics.

Creative Writing

Acted as full time instructor for this junior and senior writing course. Developed a writing portfolio for students to complete by the end of the course. The portfolio included seven different types of writing that were covered in the course: sniglets, voice, extended metaphor, character perspective journal, flash fiction, dialogue, and autobiography. Created all lessons, prompts, and rubrics.

Coming of Age

Acted as full time instructor for this junior and senior English course. Created and instructed two units: *Speak* (the course book) and Autobiography. In the *Speak* unit, there were daily entry and exit writing tasks. Students were expected to discuss and write about the topics of the book in great detail. There were also weekly quizzes on the content of the book. In the Autobiography unit, students were introduced to various forms of autobiography, including media clips, excerpts from books, and even a movie. Lessons leading up to the final project focused on how to create powerful and detailed writing, such as showing versus telling. For the final project in the unit, students developed a bound autobiography of eight chapters with a dedication page and an epilogue. Created all lessons, prompts, and rubrics.

TUTOR AND MENTOR EXPERIENCE

Resident Assistant

Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute, Spokane, WA (2012-2014) & (2007-2010)

Led weekly English tutorials Monday-Thursday evenings to a group of 10-15 Japanese students. Took students on outings throughout Spokane, teaching them about the city and its culture. Helped students with homework outside of tutorials. On call and available on campus from 10PM-6AM every other night for emergencies, student assistance, and/or translation.

AVID Tutor

Mt. Spokane High School, Mead, WA (2010-2011)

Mentored and tutored “at risk” students in the AVID program. Helped students with projects or courses they struggled with—particularly with Math, reading, and writing. Encouraged students to finish their assignments to completion. Bonded with the students and acted as a mentor.

Special Education Assistant

Mt. Spokane High School, Mead, WA (2011)

Assisted in a severely disabled special education class in the high school. Provided one-on-one mentoring with the students. Taught mini-lessons to both individual students and the whole class.

OTHER RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute, Spokane, WA

Resident Assistant (2012-2014) & (2007-2010)

Led weekly English tutorials Monday-Thursday evenings to a group of 10-15 Japanese students. Took the same group of students on outings throughout Spokane, teaching them about the town and its culture. Helped students with homework outside of tutorials. On call and available on campus from 10PM-6AM every other night if there was an emergency and the students needed help and/or a translator.

Computer Lab Assistant (2013-2014) & (2008-2010)

Assisted students with printing. Provided help for students with reading English on the computers. Tutored students in need of homework help.

Administrative Assistant (Summer 2008)

Filed and maintained important paperwork, created Excel sheets with relevant data for events and programs, and maintained a friendly atmosphere for colleagues and visitors to the office.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

- Attended the Spokane Regional ESL Conference. Spokane, WA. 2015
- Promoted and attended Dr. Rudolph's lecture: *Identity and the Construction of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Japan*. Cheney, WA. 2015
- Attended the Spokane Regional ESL Conference. Spokane, WA. 2014

AWARDS

- Alternate Graduate Assistantship for Academic Year 2013-2014
Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA.
- Nancy Crowe Memorial Scholarship for the Academic Year 2010-2011
Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA.
- Scholastic Honors Scholarship for the Academic Year 2007-2008
Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA.
- Scholastic Honors Scholarship for the Academic Year 2006-2007
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LANGUAGES

- Japanese: Intermediate speaking, reading, writing level