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An Autoethnography of a Novice ESL Teacher: Plato's Cave and English Language Teaching in Japan

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An Autoethnography of a Novice ESL Teacher:
Plato's Cave and English Language 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

Kevin Lemberger

Spring 2017

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Of
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Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This autoethnography documents the author's one-year experience teaching English in Honjo, Japan. The author details daily life in the public schools and introduces World Englishes. Chapter 1 includes definitions and examples of autoethnography as well as the author's background, which qualified him for employment in Japan. Chapter 2 is a literature review of research on varieties of English and how they are evolving and being used in classrooms in Japan. The author suggests that Baudrillard's simulation and Plato's Allegory of the Cave provide a framework for analyzing current teaching methods and materials being used in the national core curriculum in Japan. Communicative language teaching is defined, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) policy related to the teaching of English is detailed. The importance of multimodal literacies in English learning is highlighted. Autoethnography is discussed afterwards. Chapter 3 is a literacy narrative and an autoethnography describing the author's experiences living in rural Japan and teaching at three elementary schools, integrating into a culture different from his own. Chapter 4 is the author's discussion of what he learned from his experiences teaching in Japan and how this has shaped his current teaching philosophy. Chapter 5 includes (1) the limitations of the study, (2) suggestions for those preparing to teach in Japan, (3) recommendations for future research, (4) implications for teaching, (5) the value of autoethnography, and (6) final reflections.

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Dr. LaVona Reeves, my thesis mentor, contacted me while I was in Japan and encouraged me to come back to EWU to begin the MATESL program after I was finished teaching there. I took her advice. Throughout the program, she has worked tirelessly with me and other students, always sacrificing her time, sharing her expertise in TESL, and welcoming us into her writing class as interns. Having taught in Japan as well, Dr. Reeves and I were able to exchange ideas and discuss my experiences and how they relate to different theories in the field of TESL.

Dr. Tracey McHenry, the second member on my thesis committee introduced me to growing interest in World Englishes, which is touched on in this thesis. I am thankful for her time spent working with the format and editing parts of the thesis as well as her encouragement throughout the process.

Dr. Jane Ellsworth was the third committee member on this thesis. Her kindness and patience during the process are most appreciated. Her revisions have also proven very helpful.

Along with my committee members, I want to give a special thanks to my friend, colleague, and cultural broker, Aiko Nagabuchi, for being a pleasure to attend the MATESL program with and her insights into Japanese culture.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the wonderful, welcoming students and teachers in Japan with whom I worked for one school year. Their open hearts and minds helped me to adjust to new ways of teaching and learning, and their positive responses to my teaching helped me to love the profession even more and become a better teacher.

Finally, I want to thank all of the Asia University America Program (AUAP) students and the faculty that I have worked with throughout the three years I was a volunteer. Spending time with them in their English classes played a major role in my decision to make TESL my career path.

Dedication

I am dedicating this thesis to my mom and dad for providing me with both emotional and financial support throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies.

Preface

Cross-Cultural Experiences

While completing undergraduate studies at EWU, I volunteered for two years in the Asia University America Program (AUAP). I was also hired by AUAP to fill their Student Services Assistant position. After I graduated, I volunteered for a quarter in the ESL classroom at Joel E. Ferris High School in Spokane, Washington.

Volunteering with AUAP consisted of participating in their classrooms on the EWU campus. Volunteers are utilized as classroom helpers; they work with students on pronunciation, vocabulary building, questions, and conversation practice.

While working for AUAP as their *Student Services Assistant*, I was in charge of creating and coordinating events for AUAP students. My position required me to contact Cheney- and Spokane-based organizations that were open to allowing AUAP students to provide a service for them. I set up dates and events with organizations who were interested. Cheney Food Bank is one of the organizations that AUAP students volunteer with almost every month. Typically, I would take students to these events and work alongside them.

Volunteering in ESL classrooms at Joel E. Ferris High School involved phonics, pronunciation, and vocabulary practice for low to intermediate level ELLs. I spent much of my volunteer time working with one individual who was in need of phonics practice with the English alphabet.

Language Learning

I studied Japanese for three years. After volunteering with the AUAP program and hearing Japanese being spoken, I decided to study on my own for about one year. I then

decided to take a full year of Japanese classes at EWU a year later.

Writing and Teaching Experience

The teaching experience I had prior to entering the master's program, for the most part, was in Japan where I taught first- through sixth-grade. Four days a week, I taught fifth- and sixth-grade while the other day I taught first- through fourth-grade. When working with fifth- and sixth-grade students, I strived to give students ample speaking practice and provide them with opportunities to enjoy the English language. When working with first- through fourth-grade students, there was even more emphasis on providing that same speaking opportunities as well as a focusing on basic vocabulary practice. The classes I taught typically had 22 to 35 students. I always taught with a Japanese teacher; however, I was asked to do most of the teaching because of my level of English. I also created nearly all of the lesson plans utilized in class.

Teaching Philosophy

For teaching English to non-native English-speaking students, authenticity is a major focus of my lesson design. In TESL, we define “authentic” as communicative activities and media that have not been modified for language learning, which I frequently employ in my classes. This means that ELLs are viewing clips from documentaries, newscasts, and movies that are in the original form—with or without subtitles in the target language (TL) or the L1. In my classes, ELLs have opportunities to communicate daily with the aim of speaking and writing not only appropriately but also accurately in the target language. Accuracy, which is often tied to drill-oriented activities at the lower levels, is a necessary staple of the ELL classroom because students often need to pass mandatory tests to enter universities and the workforce. I am interested in creating ways to make

accuracy activities more communicative. In other words, there are several kinds of competence—grammatical, socio-pragmatic, and discourse competence being the most critical. Finally, keeping students motivated through engaging activities and classroom communication is highly important to me. Through my experiences living and teaching in Japan, I gained an understanding of the importance of student motivation, linguistic accuracy, and materials' authenticity—all of which provide students with opportunities to grow in their language skills and experience the living language.

The process of creating motivating, authentic, and accuracy-based activities, although challenging, can prove most beneficial for students. While working with Japanese elementary students, I experimented with activities in which students could monitor their own accuracy while communicating in the TL. I would often pair students together, assign topics and phrases to each student and instruct them to create a correct conversation. Because the lesson is not a call-and-response activity between the teacher and the students, it often makes the students feel more comfortable in creating and applying the language to their own conversation practice, which they did not have to write down. To check for accuracy, I would hover around the pairs and address any problems I heard to the whole class in an attempt to avoid singling students out and reducing motivation to use the language. When given the power to take ownership of the TL, while aiding and correcting other students whom they were talking to, students seemed to be more motivated and have higher levels of enjoyment. Although my experience is with Japanese students, much research in TESL documents the benefits of using these types of lessons with many different students, levels, and cultures.

While I value communicative activities, I also believe teacher-led lessons have an important place in the classroom. While teaching English 101 at Eastern Washington University, I gave direct instruction to introduce major writing projects such as the literacy narrative, the argumentative essay, and the essay exam; providing crucial information and urging students to ask any question that pertains to the topic at hand. I did this with the hope of creating a classroom climate where students feel comfortable asking questions. After finishing a lecture-based activity, I typically asked students to write a journal on the topic and then converse with the person next to them about what they had learned from the lecture or how they can relate to it. While these lecture-based activities create a structure students can expect, it also strengthens the classroom community.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

In 2014, after two years of volunteering in the Asia University America Program (AUAP), an English Exchange program at Eastern Washington University, and earning the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, I set a goal of teaching English in Japan. Using the website, Gaijinpot.com, I applied for Assistant Language Teaching (ALT) positions in Japan. With hundreds of ALT positions available on Gaijinpot.com, I applied to five different companies. Joytalk was one of those companies. I was most interested in Joytalk because they provided the most support to their ALTs. My Japanese speaking ability was at a basic level, so their offering of 24-hour support from employees who are trained to help ALTs settle into a new country was reassuring. Joytalk was searching for enthusiastic ALTs who excelled at working with others. It's a necessity for ALTs to work well with others because they always teach with a Japanese co-teacher. I felt that I fit these requirements, as well as the others listed in the job posting and was confident in my abilities to fulfill them. After a couple of weeks of searching for jobs, I received an email from Joytalk inviting me to interview with them. This was encouraging because Joytalk seemed to be the company that fit my needs the best.

Joytalk and I set up a Skype interview shortly after a few emails. The interview requested that I talk about myself, speak some Japanese, and sing a song in English. It all went fairly well. About two weeks later, after much anxiety, I received a job offer from

Joytalk. Living with my parents at the time, I rushed up the basement stairs to tell them the good news: I was going to Japan to teach English.

Below is Joytalk's mission statement that clarifies what the company believed and how ALTs were being trained.

Joytalk Mission Statement

Philosophy of Management and Education

(1) Philosophy of Management

A World of Joy

Enjoy Success Through JOYTALK

We at Joytalk continually renew our business philosophy for every employee in unison to earnestly strive for *joy*. *Joy* is achieved through a sincere desire for growth, and composure in the face of difficulty. In the Spirit of making every effort one of *joy*, the management and employees will strive to expand our business philosophy in the noble pursuit of education, support the growth of children with love, and make an effort to foster an environment of *joy* with each other. It is our hope that all of our foreign employees from around the work will experience and understand this philosophy of *joy*, and share it with their families, coworkers, and communities.

(2) Philosophy of Education

“To support the growth and formation of *character* with *love* and *joy*.”

Love: To treasure oneself and others through relationships; to cherish each other with a caring heart; to have the will to approve of and forgive each other.

Character: From the basis of love, to possess a balance of cultural knowledge, skill, human relations, and a sense of responsibility, that no other animal other than humans is capable of.

Statement of the Problem & A Brief History

Aya Matsuda (2003), a leading scholar of World Englishes, wrote “Incorporating World Englishes in Teaching English as an International Language” to underscore the need for Japanese students to be exposed to English other than “inner-circle” varieties of Anglophone countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. Reminding readers that World Englishes warrant considerable discussion in courses for those preparing to teach English overseas, she emphasizes that there is no one standard English, and we must accept the many, many varieties of English spoken around the world while incorporating these voices into materials to teach English in Japan. It seems, however, that this is not being done yet, despite MEXT’s policy changes that ask teachers to use English in class and to encourage learners to do so as well.

Looking back, we see that getting teachers to use English in class in Japan is not a new challenge. Lionel Crocker, in 1928, wrote in an *English Journal* article, “The Impact of English on Japanese”:

‘Teaching English as if it were a dead language has caused Japanese business men serious financial losses in international trade,’ said K. Matsukata, Kobe shipping magnate. Japan looks at the study of English much more seriously than America looks at the study of a foreign language. It pays Japan in dollars, and cents.

‘Ricksha men, postal employees, merchants, street-car conductors, captains of ocean liners, attendants at international conferences, proprietors of restaurants all have to know English.’ (p. 288)

Crocker indicated that in 1928 teachers were using English as the medium of instruction in English classes throughout Japan, but it was being taught in ways that may not have

been authentic. The term “dead language” has pervaded the literature about the English being taught in Japan for almost a century now.

In 1956, for example, William Cullen Bryant, II wrote an article for *PMLA* he titled “English Language Teaching in Japanese Schools”. There he described some of the challenges the country faced in teaching and learning English:

As THEIR SCHOOLS reopen this year after the summer vacation, about 7,000,000 Japanese children from 12 to 18 years old are spending five hours a week studying English. They are taught by some 85,000 teachers, few of whom have ever heard the language spoken by a native except, perhaps, over the radio. In the universities hundreds of thousands more are busy with their seventh, eighth, ninth, or tenth year of English. (p. 21)

It seems that in 1956 and much earlier, like thousands of other Japanese, English teachers were listening to English lessons on the radio and trying to learn English—possibly in part because of the occupation of the United States military after WWII from 1945-1952.

In large cities tens of thousands of clerks and secretaries, waitresses and salesgirls, bankers and government employees of all ages go several evenings a week to commercial schools to learn English conversation and business correspondence. Many of these are among several hundred thousand listeners to radio English courses. (p. 21)

In 1956, the Japanese were taking the study of English very seriously, but the focus remained on grammar, not necessarily communicative competence:

At newsstands and bookstores, on streetcars and buses, electric trains and subways, thousands more are poring over magazines with English articles, movie scenarios and jokes; over grammar books whose chapter headings, such as ‘Elliptical Negation’ and ‘Concessive Clause,’ suggest their contents; over cram books, word lists and sample examinations. (p. 21)

For the most part, teachers were preparing students for entrance exams, which students perceived as a kind of "hell" on earth:

For high schools follow the lead of universities in making English grammar and translation a part of the rigorous ordeal called shiken jigoku, or ‘examination hell,’ a stiffly competitive process of admission. And ever more business firms are requiring job applicants to take English tests. (p. 21)

Even today in 2017, entrance exams and TOEIC scores remain major motivators in high school and businesses, respectively, in Japan, as will be discussed briefly in Chapter 2.

Bryant reminds readers that grammar was being taught rigorously in 1956, but not speaking or listening.

The remoteness of Japanese grammatical structure from that of English, and the difficulty of learning to recognize thousands of Chinese characters (in which the language was written) and to write them in several different ways, made it unlikely that a few hours a week analyzing and translating complicated English constructions into Japanese would result in the ability to read at sight and understand the niceties of English style. To learn to speak and understand English by this method was still less feasible. (p. 21)

Bryant does not explain why it was "less feasible" to learn to speak in this method, but one can infer it was due to teachers' limited ability to communicate in English and limited contact with Anglophones in Japan.

The emphasis in English education in Japan at that time was reading, not speaking. Even though in 1928 teachers were using English as the medium of instruction in Japan, by 1956 they no longer spoke English in class nor hid their inability to do so, according to Bryant:

‘Japanese teachers’ (commented one leading educator) ‘make no secret of their utter incompetence in oral intercourse; it is not expected of them. In fact, there is a deplorable propensity to boast of colloquial ignorance. . . . A foreign language is thus made an exercise of the eyes and not of the ears. Its conquests are intellectual and not social. Its best helps are books and worst trials conversation. We treat modern European languages with as much respect and intellectual profit as Europeans treat classical languages. The serious difference in our case, however, is that the languages we study are not yet dead. (p. 21)

A question one would ask, even today, is whether competence in spoken English is “expected of them”—the Japanese who are teaching English in Japan now.

Purpose

The purpose of the present study is to

- 1) document my experience as a novice English teacher working in three elementary schools in Honjo, Japan;
- 2) describe how English is being taught in Japanese elementary schools;

- 3) define Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as mandated by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT);
- 4) introduce and analyze Baudrillard's simulation and Plato's Allegory of the Cave as they relate to the kind of English being taught in Japan in public elementary schools;
- 5) reflect on what I learned in my first year of teaching English; and
- 6) explain the meaning and relevance of autoethnography as a research method, particularly for ESL teachers in a new culture.

Assumptions

Prior to arriving in Japan to begin teaching, I made two major assumptions, which TESOL requires that researchers disclose in critical or autoethnography:

1. I will have to follow Japanese teachers' procedures, teach their materials, and adapt to approaches to language teaching.
2. Japanese colleagues will be there to mentor me and walk me through everything.

These assumptions will be discussed in Chapter 4, just before the research questions are answered in the same chapter.

Research Questions

In writing this autoethnography, I wanted to focus on and answer the following questions.

1. What changes did I experience both while there and after my return?
 - i. Was there an adjustment period there?
 - ii. How did I handle it?
 - iii. What went well?

iv. What was the hardest?

2. What did I learn about Japanese people, their customs, and their educational system?
3. How has my current teaching philosophy been influenced by my work in Japan?
4. How does a novice English teacher navigate the challenges in the classroom in elementary schools in Japan?
5. How was I received by colleagues and students, and how did I know I was fitting in?
6. What were the challenges and benefits of going to different schools on different days?
7. What worked in my teaching?

Research Method: Autoethnography

Peter McIlveen (2008) in “Autoethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in vocational psychology,” defines the method as “a reflexive means by which the researcher-practitioner consciously embeds himself or herself amidst theory and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographic account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation or intervention” (p. 13). McIlveen explains that it is used in “anthropology, sociology, and education (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Etherington, 2004; ReedDanahay, 1997; Roth, 2005) and focuses on the “practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon” (2008, p. 3).

In the present study, I did consciously “embed” myself in the Japanese education system to practice critical consciousness—Geneva Gay’s term—to try to discover what

kind of English was being taught there and what I might contribute as a native speaker of English.

McIlveen continues to clarify what the primary purpose is for those entering a new profession or vocation: “Autoethnography is presented as a vehicle to operationalize social constructionist research and practice that aims to establish trustworthiness and authenticity. Furthermore, the method is presented as a means to operationalize the notion of critical consciousness within researchers and practitioners” (p. 13). In the present study, I practice critical consciousness by introducing Baudrillard’s concept of simulation and Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and drawing an analogy to the English being taught in Japan.

Rhetorical Structure

McIlveen notes that “the rhetorical structure of an autoethnographic narrative analysis may vary widely from the formal style of a scientific publication to literary texts, perhaps even poetic” (p. 4). He clarifies that “there are few regulations on how to write out an autoethnographic narrative analysis, as it is the meaning of the story that is important, rather than conventions of scholarly production” (p. 4). Here and in other theses written in the graduate program in English/TESL, the autoethnographies have taken many forms, and some include photos (Holland, 2015), but all tell stories through elements of memoir as well as “concurrent self-observation and recording” with the aim of producing “a meaningful account” (p. 4). The author here qualifies by stating what autoethnography is not: “Rather than a self-absorbed rendering, an autoethnography should produce a narrative that is authentic and thus enable the reader to deeply grasp the experience and interpretation of this one interesting case” (p. 4). What I tried to do in the account of my

teaching in Japan was to incorporate cultural information that would help the reader to understand my life, primarily in the classroom as I navigated and created new spaces for teaching English there.

Critical ethnography

In autoethnography, there is often the need to examine the culture of the classroom, especially when teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as I was doing in Japan.

TESOL defines critical ethnography:

In ethnographic research the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a specific period of time. A cultural group can be any group of individuals who share a common social experience, location, or other social characteristic of interest. Ethnography is an extremely broad area with a great variety of practitioners and methods. However, the most common ethnographic approach is participant observation as a part of field research. Typically the ethnographer becomes immersed in the culture as an active participant and records extensive field notes. (CSU, web)

As stated, I was a participant observer working with “an intact cultural group in a natural setting”—the English classroom in three schools in Saitama Prefecture. While I did not have “extensive field notes” that were written as I was teaching in Japan, I have done retrospective accounts of my time there, and these are included in Chapter 3.

Thesis Overview

Chapter 2 is a brief review of literature about (1) Communicative Language Teaching in Japan (2) World Englishes and their effects on Japanese EFL teaching; (3) multimodal literacy and identity (Albalawi, 2015; Buckingham & Bazalgette, 2013; Gardner & Davis, 2013; Hansen, 2016; NCTE.org, 2017; Jocius, 2016; Low & Ghiso, 2013; O’Byrne & Murrell, 2014); (4) Plato’s cave and English language teaching and learning in Japan; and (5) autoethnography as research method (Canagarajah, 2012 ; Holland, 2015; Lee, 2012; Ryan, 2012).

Chapter 3 is the researcher’s (1) literacy narrative focusing on his learning to read and coming to love the English language and (2) an autoethnography detailing one year of teaching in three elementary schools in Honjo City, in Saitama Prefecture, which is northwest of Tokyo.

Chapter 4 is (1) a discussion of and reflections on the assumptions the researcher made prior to beginning the project, as well as (2) answers to the research questions providing insights into Japanese culture.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion including (1) limitations of the study; (2) suggestions for teaching in elementary schools in Japan; (3) recommendations for future research/implications for teaching; and (4) the value of autoethnography and final reflections.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter 2 is a brief review of literature about (1) Communicative Language Teaching in Japan (2) World Englishes and their effects on Japanese EFL teaching; (3) multimodal literacy and identity (Albalawi, 2015; Buckingham & Bazalgette, 2013; Gardner & Davis, 2013; Hansen, 2016; NCTE.org, 2017; Jocius, 2016; Low & Ghiso, 2013; O’Byrne & Murrell, 2014); (4) Plato’s cave and English language teaching and learning in Japan; and (5) autoethnography as research method (Canagarajah, 2012 ; Holland, 2015; Lee, 2012; Ryan, 2012).

Communicative Language Teaching

With globalization, Japan’s education system has undergone major changes in the teaching of English (Nishino, 2012; Lamie, 2004; Ellis, 2004). In 1989, the Ministry of Education, now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), decided to place more focus on students’ abilities to produce and understand basic English (Ellis, 2004; Lamie, 2004; Sakui, 2004). With this policy change, MEXT intended for teachers to move away from Grammar Translation Method (Cook, 2010) toward the Direct Method in which those teaching English would be speaking English most of the time in class. This meant that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as defined by the British Council, would be adopted K-12:

The communicative approach is based on the idea that learning language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning. When learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for

language acquisition will be used, and this will allow them to learn to use the language....Classroom activities...are characterised by trying to produce meaningful and real communication, at all levels. As a result there may be more emphasis on skills than systems, lessons are more learner-centred, and there may be authentic materials [films, songs, readings in the form and unmodified for language learning] (British Council.org, 2017)

Almost 30 years ago, the Grammar Translation Method was receiving criticism for not adequately preparing students for authentic speaking in English and was more oriented toward writing practice through translation from Japanese to English and vice versa. Further, this method did not aid students in reaching greater proficiency and fluency (Kleinsasser & Sato, 1999). Although many school systems have tried to phase out the Grammar Translation Method, it is important to note that some teachers still believe it has validity in the EFL classroom (Kelly & Bruen, 2015).

MEXT did some curricular and policy changes to place more emphasis on communicative activities for Grades 1-12. The intent of these changes is captured:

To form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages. (web, 2017)

They identified what teachers were expected to teach in Grades 5 and 6, which is the exact level at which the researcher/ethnographer in the present study was teaching in Honjo, Japan 2014-15:

II. CONTENTS [Grade 5 and Grade 6]

1. Instructions should be given on the following items in order to help pupils actively engage in communication in a foreign language:

1) To experience the joy of communication in the foreign language.

2) To actively listen to and speak in the foreign language. (web, 2017)

Learning objectives were identified, and it appears that there has been a shift toward speech production and cultural awareness, as explained in the MEXT policy. Learners are expected

- a) To become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the foreign language, to learn its differences from the Japanese language, and to be aware of the interesting aspects of language and its richness.
- b) To learn the differences in ways of living, customs and events between Japan and foreign countries and to be aware of various points of view and ways of thinking.
- c) To experience communication with people of different cultures and to deepen the understanding of culture. (MEXT, web, 2017)

This new policy paved the way for teachers from Anglophone countries to teach in Japanese elementary classrooms through government sponsorship, which meant that English could become the medium of instruction in limited ways. Direct Method involves teacher-fronted classrooms in which the teacher speaks English, promoting student engagement with the materials, which is “the responsibility of the teacher at the beginning, and the learner is supposed to be engaged in the learning process” (Al-Shammari, Al-Sharoufi, & Yawkey, 2008, p. 83). In a study conducted in a Kuwait elementary school, two groups were taught a lesson, one using Direct Method and one using grammar translation. The group instructed by Direct Method exhibited greater listening comprehension of the material (Al-Shammari, Al-Sharoufi, & Yawkey, 2008). However, although the Direct Method may prove successful in promoting comprehension, it does not promote as much student-centered communication, which is what MEXT was interested in implementing. The Direct Method of learning is often focused on teacher-produced language practice instead of student-based communication. Ultimately, this has led to CLT being the frontrunner for English instruction in the Japanese classroom.

Again, CLT is focused on aiding students in achieving communicative competence in English. Dell Hymes (1971) “defined communicative competence as not only as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations” (as cited in Bagaric & Djigunovic, 2007, p. 2). Further, Savignon (1997) suggested that a classroom model of communicative competence includes Canale and Swain’s (1983) four components which are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic

competence... “These elements together help support both theoretical and practical foundations for CLT” (as cited in Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999, p. 495).

When the need for more authentic language is discussed, sociolinguistic competence—the ability for students to speak appropriately in the L2—and discourse competence, the ability to carry on a fluent discussion with a target language speaker, are two of the major competencies that CLT promotes more than the Grammar Translation Method. Research has shown that implementation of CLT, with its aims to produce more authentic language in the classroom, has been problematic (Kleinsasser & Sato, 1999; Cook, 2010; Lamie, 2004; Nishino, 2012; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Sakui, 2004; Kelly & Bruen, 2015). Some obstacles facing successful CLT instruction include teacher beliefs and efficacy (Nishino, 2012; Sakui, 2004), knowledge of the English language (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Kleinsasser & Sato, 1999), teaching to high-stakes university exams, and overall familiarity with the CLT approach as well as student motivation and culture.

Factors Affecting CLT Instruction

Teacher efficacy is defined as a “teacher’s beliefs in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, as cited in Nishino, 2012, p. 381). Because some of these factors are so closely related to the teachers, much research has been conducted through case studies and interviews with Japanese teachers of English (JTE’s). A study was published in 2012, by Takako Nishino, to show the major factors affecting CLT instruction in Japanese classrooms. One of the largest factors was student-related communicative conditions (Nishino, 2012). The study involved a

questionnaire, which four teachers filled out before they were observed in their classrooms. Disclosing results of the study, Nishino states that “when teachers perceive that students’ expectations for communication and their ability to engage in pair and group work are high, the teachers are likely to use communicative activities” (Nishino, 2012, p. 387-388). This points to teachers’ perception of student motivation to learn English in authentic contexts as a factor in successful CLT instruction. It also points to the importance of student attitudes and motivations, which will be addressed later.

Because JTE’s may have had little CLT experience as students, it is difficult for them to implement CLT in their own classrooms (Lamie, 2004; Cook, 2010; Nishino 2012). This lack of teacher education has been acknowledged, and now some JTE’s are being sent to Anglophone countries to better familiarize themselves with CLT. In a study published by Judith Lamie, four JTE’s attended overseas CLT training courses, and as self-reported, they showed progress in teaching more authentic CLT lessons once arriving back in Japan. They reported their “aims, grammar, organization, correcting, materials, vocabulary, the four skills, language use, dictionaries and testing” were more in the spirit of CLT after the in-service training took place (Lamie, 2004, p. 121).

However, even with the seeming success of the study, “cultural ramifications, combined with the intricacies of curriculum developments, clearly present the change process as a journey that is far from straightforward” (Lamie, 2004, p. 134-135). Teacher beliefs, efficacy, and experience play large roles in successful CLT instruction in the classroom. However, students’ preferences were not collected or reported by Lamie; only the teachers’ feedback was collected and analyzed.

MEXT has pushed hard to make Japanese classrooms more communicative. The ultimate goal of the MEXT (2003) was “to develop students’ practical communication abilities such as understanding information and the speaker’s or writer’s intention, expressing their own ideas, deepening the understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages” (as cited in Kikuchi, 2009, p. 2). To this end, more than 100 Super English language high schools (SELhi’s) have been created. An increase in Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) teachers has been made as well. The JET program, the most well-known foreign exchange teaching program, provides Japan with native English speaking teachers who teach cooperatively with Japanese teachers of English in the hope of providing student engagement and motivation to learn English. Dornyei (2001) conducted a study that led to eight factors being attributed to Japanese student de-motivation:

- 1) teachers
- 2) school facilities,
- 3) students’ experience in the past
- 4) students’ negative attitudes toward the English language or community
- 5) the compulsory nature of English study in high school
- 6) interference by another foreign language that students are studying
- 7) the attitudes of other students in their class
- 8) the textbooks used. (as cited in Kikuchi, 2009)

In a study by Kikuchi, involving five students attending private universities and 42 students attending public universities, he found more specific demotivating factors. The three most de-motivating factors in the study were teacher behavior, grammar-translation

method, and tests and university entrance exams. To lessen student demotivation, Kikuchi offers the advice for Japanese teachers of English to use grammar translation sparingly so students have more opportunities for communication. In regards to university entrance exams, he suggests that teachers avoid classes that focus entirely on exam preparation, as it relies too much on memorization (Kikuchi, 2009).

We see that two factors that have already been discussed in this literature review—teacher behavior and the use of grammar-translation method, to some extent—are causing issues for teachers and students alike. The third factor, university entrance exams, also influences teaching methods. One of the most well-known English exams for Japanese university juniors looking for jobs is the TOEIC test. In'nami and Koizumi (2012) explain: “Since its inception in 1979, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) test, developed by the Educational Testing Service, has been one of the most widely used tests as a common yardstick for measuring the ability of nonnative English speakers to understand English in a work-related context” (In'nami & Koizumi, 2012, p. 131). The TOEIC test has four possible sections: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Only one section is dedicated to speaking, and the speaking required is often business oriented, as it is a test largely used for the job search in business.

Although the TOEIC is one of the most popular tests for placing students into universities and places of employment, there have been fewer tests of its validity when compared to other tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (In'nami & Koizumi, 2012). Recognizing the demotivating effect of standardized tests on Japanese students, as mentioned previously in Kikuchi (2009), is extremely important to

understanding the current climate of English instruction in Japan. As the students in that study craved more opportunities for authentic communication in the classroom, the TOEIC test, which has such a great impact on their future, may not address those student needs and desires.

In the late 1980's, Japan's Ministry of Education made a large push for more Communicative Language Teaching in their public schools. Since then, much research has been done on the factors leading to the success of CLT. Factors from teacher beliefs, efficacy, familiarity with English, CLT training, and student motivation have provided a landscape of the current situation of English instruction in Japan. Studies have shown that because of these factors, many teachers are having difficulties providing authentic CLT instruction, and student motivation is being affected by lingering effects of the Grammar Translation Model and tests such as the TOEIC that still require many aspects of that model to receive high test scores. However, these studies have been primarily conducted within the scope of English instruction in Japanese schools. Little research has been conducted regarding these factors in a foreign exchange program setting, in which students are in a country that predominantly speaks English and is taught by professors whose native language is English and have more experience with authentic CLT instruction.

World English and its effect on Japanese EFL classrooms

In the last decade, ESL and EFL classrooms have become the center of an issue involving Non-native-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Historically, countries that provide students with English instruction have sought to hire native English-speaking teachers, often Caucasian instructors from countries such as the U.S.A, Australia, and the U.K.

Countries hire these instructors with the thought that they, being native speakers, will provide them with the highest level of communicative competence and cultural insight. However, recent research is challenging this notion. Researchers are questioning how authentic and applicable to the lives of ELL students “standard” and “native” English are. Because NNESTs have gone through the experience of learning English as a non-native language they share a reality with ELLs that native-English-speaking teachers, especially from countries with highly differing cultures do not. The openness to the benefits of NNESTs in ESL classrooms is captured by Sakai and D’Angelo’s article, *A Vision for world Englishes in the Expanding Circle*:

By unshackling ourselves from the unrealistic expectations of ‘native-like fluency,’ we can develop a more powerful tool for true communication and exchange of ideas and opinions. We have come to realize that we should not give special status or treatment to native-speaker countries or individuals, but that we must bring people from all nations into our circle, and have a true merit-based system and search for excellence. (Sakai & D’Angelo, p. 323-324)

Reiko Takahashi claims that there are three main reasons for exposing students to outer-circle and expanding-circle varieties. The first reason is that if students are exposed to different varieties of English they will not be caught off guard when their variety of English differs from a person they talk to. The second reason is that students will become more aware of the concept of EIL. Finally, students will gain familiarity with distinctive features of different varieties of English, which will help students to interpret what people who use these varieties are saying (Takahashi, p. 43).

Using Multimodality to Promote Awareness and Identity

In the late 1970's, the concept of multimodality in the classroom began to emerge into scholarly articles about best practices. Nearly 50 years later, it has been explored at a much higher level because its need is much greater; students in current times are often connected to and communicating on some form of media other than text. To reflect this change, the NCTE now has a position statement on multimodal literacies which they define here:

It is the interplay of meaning-making systems (alphabetic, oral, visual, etc.) that teachers and students should strive to study and produce.

'Multiple ways of knowing' (Short & Harste) also include art, music, movement, and drama, which should not be considered curricular luxuries.

(NCTE.org, 2017)

This position statement seems compatible with the MEXT policy of “fostering a positive attitude” toward the language and culture as is the mission of JoyTalk discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Further, NCTE emphasizes the fact that “[y]oung children practice multimodal literacies naturally and spontaneously. They easily combine and move between drama, art, text, music, speech, sound, physical movement, animation/gaming, etc.” (NCTE.org, 2017). In training ALT's for Japanese classrooms, JoyTalk, for example, teaches them how to incorporate songs, dances, and games into their lessons to appeal to young Japanese learners of English.

Hansen, however, explains, “The term multimodality has obtained popularity, but we cannot assume that every student knows how to use technology correctly, especially

within the classroom” (2015, p. 5). Authors Howard Gardner and Katie Davis label students who have grown up connected to some form of media “digital natives,” “because they have grown up immersed in the hardware and software of the day” (2013, p. 1). With the explosion of technology in the last few decades, research has suggested that because there has been a change in how we are processing information through different forms of media, classrooms require a change in curriculum to attend to these changes (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 2013). Multimodality, sometimes referred to as visual literacy, new literacies, digital literacies, and multi-literacies, can broadly be defined as utilizing mediums other than solely printed text: televisions, computers, tablets, smartphones, cameras, and others to create meaning and engage students in the world around them. Multimodality helps students “to make sense of their world and to share their understandings.” (Eiserman & Blatter, 2014, p. 171). As research emerges on degrees of success that classroom multimodality achieves in the United States, the common aspects of student learning seen in the research seem to be on individual creation of meaning, collaboration, engagement, and ownership.

Recent research has shown that multimodal literacy lessons have experienced success in primary schools, high schools, and universities. “Researchers have suggested that digital tools, such as cameras and iPads, can be used to motivate young readers and writers who, for one reason or another, have become disengaged from classroom literacy practices.” (Jocius, 2016, p. 17). Jocius explains a multimodal assignment given to students living in a low socioeconomic area. The students were required to create a visual artifact such as a picture collage, reenactment, or video using a theme in a book they would read. Jocius reported watching one of her disengaged students spend hours poring

over *The Outsiders* while creating a family portrait. Jocius states, “I saw these “at-risk” students ask powerful questions, challenge interpretations, and produce sophisticated analyses of literary elements such as characterization, theme, and text structure.” (2016, p. 17). The ability for students, both disengaged and engaged, to share information in an academic setting, is important. Along with aiding students in sharing ideas and building understandings, multimodality provides students with understandings of different learning styles and different ways to understand and interpret classroom texts. Benefits such as these are being seen in multimodal activities in all grades.

Scholar and teacher, Janet Blatter conducted a study with nine second-graders utilizing YouTube videos, songs, and folklore to aid students understanding of French settlers in North America (Eiserman & Blatter, 2014). In the study, students created storyboards in which they collaborated with each other to create individual understanding of the Acadian people. Blatter states, “Through analysis of the recordings and the artifacts of their investigation, we learned that a collaborative, multimodal approach does, indeed, provide children with a rich understanding of plot and character and a familiarity with the ethos of Acadian cultural traditions” (2014, p. 172). Through collaboration, students engaging in activities such as these not only develop important social skills, but also get to take ownership of their own understanding in the form of a tangible artifact. Although this study was focused on how multimodality may help second-grade students, skills such as collaboration and construction of meaning are skills that students of all ages need. As an instructor of English 101 at a comprehensive, four year university, I realize the importance of collaboration in the classroom, as it helps promote student engagement.

Focusing on high school level classes, we see different multimodal techniques are being utilized. One technique that has seen increasing popularity is blogging. Shirky (2008) states, “Blogs, like other social software, are most often described as two-way communication tools that lend themselves to collaboration, cooperation and participation” (as cited in O’Byrne and Murrell, 2014, p. 927). However, most research done on blogging in the classroom has been focused only on text based assignments. O’Byrne and Murrell claim that “much of the existing research on educational blogs has focused on the capacity of text-based postings and responses to support learning through deeper reflection, interactivity and collaboration” (2014, p. 927). In research conducted by O’Byrne and Murrell, using blogs in an eleventh-grade English class, students were instructed to create a blog in which they posted texts and videos to respond to a socially relevant theme. They were interested in how a blog activity requiring students to make a short movie may affect student reflective learning, engagement, and participation. Their research concluded with evidence not substantial enough to support that blogging helped student learning, but the commenting between students showed proof of self-awareness and knowledge construction (2014). In both the study of the second-graders and eleventh-graders, multimodal techniques seemed to successfully promote participation, collaboration and construction of meaning. However, similar to these studies, little research on multimodality has focused on the aspect of identity creation and how all of these factors pertain to populations of English language learners which are increasing rapidly.

Maria Paula Ghiso and David E. Low, in their article on multimodal narratives used for immigrant students, state, “Across the United States (US) and internationally,

schools have become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, and much emphasis has been placed – across the ideological spectrum – on the intersections of curriculum and identity” (Ghiso & Low, 2013, p. 26). Required narratives, although sometimes helpful in aiding students from different backgrounds to tell their story, also, especially if constructed in an unthoughtful and inauthentic way, can make a student feel their story may not be relevant or of importance. Ghiso and Low, in their research, wanted to see how multimodal narratives such as story books or graphic novels might encourage non-native English speaking students to take ownership in their story and aid them in presenting it in a way that isn’t simply text on a page. These activities may open up opportunities for students to find out best how they can construct meaning and convey it in a new language, especially when these students are often seen as destined to fail. Vasudevan and Campano (2009) state, “Current literacy policies typically frame diverse students’ backgrounds and experiences from a deficit orientation – as factors that place students ‘at risk’ of school failure” (as cited in Ghiso & Low, 2013, p. 27). Helping these students try out different methods and modes to complete an assignment may contribute to identity development, which will help them be successful throughout their entire academic career. But identity is not just something non-native English speakers are creating at a university/college level.

As social media has become a major form of communication, how people represent themselves and perceive others online has become an issue of discussion. In their book, *The App Generation*, Howard Gardner and Katie Davis claim that “the identities of young people are increasingly packaged. That is, they are developed and put forth so that they convey a certain desirable-indeed, determinedly upbeat-image of the

person in question” (2013, p. 61). Many apps available to young people are used to present themselves in the most flattering way, and they promote the users to focus on themselves. Gardner and Davis state, “Individualism and self-focus are evident in the vast marketplace of apps, which gives youth endless opportunity to personalize their digital experience” (2013, p. 72). The focus on self that is promoted by many online apps makes the need for collaboration in the classroom even more important. As the studies in this paper have demonstrated, the collaboration required in many multimodal activities promotes student self-awareness and engagement. Utilizing this self-awareness and engagement to promote less self-centered and more collaborative identities may prove beneficial in the classroom.

In a beginning level English class, such as English 101, providing students with different ways in which to complete assignments can prove extremely beneficial. Allowing non-native speakers to tell their stories through different modes of expression or allowing native English speakers to use a medium they have grown up using will likely promote engagement in the material and self-awareness. In regards to identity, as non-native speakers are building their identity in a new place, the ability for them to try different modes in which they can express themselves will help them more easily find a solid identity in a new place. For native English speakers, they likely have created an online identity, but it is often not conducive to collaborative work in the classroom.

Both native and non-native students in a beginner level English class could benefit greatly from a quarter- or semester-long blog project in which multiple assignments throughout the year were required to be put on each individual’s blog. For students from Saudi Arabia, interaction with media such as blogging may provide higher

student interest. Albalawi states, “Saudi students will be more interested in learning the English language when media is included in instructional materials.” (2015, p. 4). The assignments could range from short video clips, audio narrations, texts, storyboards, and/or practically anything that can be uploaded to the students’ blogs. Students would be allowed to customize their blog with color and music, however, pictures would not be used. The reasoning behind this, as Gardner and Davis mention, is that often online-based applications are focused on the individual. The aim of the blog project would be to get students to respond to and discuss each other’s work, making it more group-oriented. In doing this, students may develop more of an awareness of themselves and their ideas in a group of other humans and their ideas, rather than creating their own isolated page in which they can doctor and present themselves in many ways. Hopefully, this would also help break down barriers between native and non-native students by seeing each other’s ideas instead of pictures that do not adequately represent them fully. I concede that creating assignment requirements that can be completely filled by all modes of work may prove to be a burden on the instructor, but if done correctly, it may prove engaging, collaborative, and helpful for promoting group-oriented identities that will aid students in seeing themselves as thoughtful and contributing members of a classroom.

Applying *Allegory of the Cave* to Modern ESL/EFL Classrooms

In the last decade, ESL and EFL classrooms have become the center of an issue involving Non-native-English-speaking teachers (NNEST). Historically, countries that provide students with English instruction have sought to hire native English-speaking teachers, often Caucasian instructors from countries such as the U.S.A, Australia, and the U.K. Countries hire these instructors with the thought that they, being native speakers, will

provide them with the highest level of communicative competence and cultural insight. However, recent research is challenging this notion. Researchers are questioning how authentic and applicable to the lives of ELL students “standard” and “native” English are. Because NNEST have gone through the experience of learning English as a non-native language they share a reality with ELLs that native-English- speaking teachers, especially from countries with highly differing cultures do not. The analysis of the roles of native and non-native English speaking teachers is under critical examination. This section is an application of Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* and Baudrillard’s concept of “simulation” to NNEST and their role in the ESL/EFL classroom. In a discussion of “standard” and “native” English and the benefits of providing students with different, more authentic forms of English. Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* is analyzed

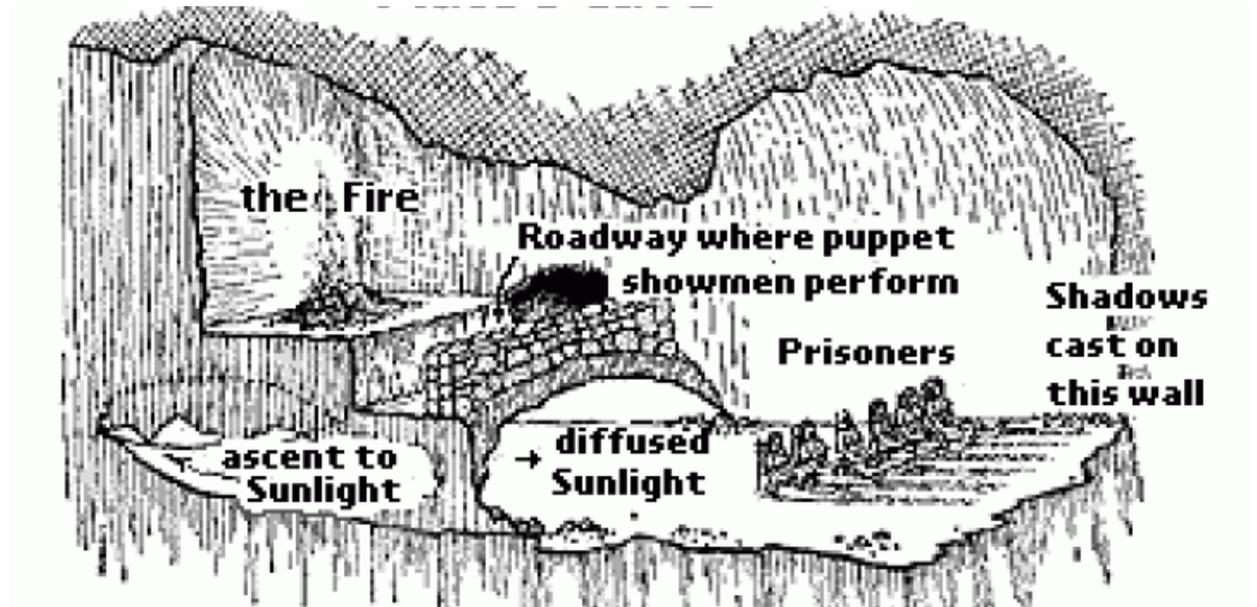


Figure 1 (<https://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/cave.htm>)

Allegory of the Cave was written around 380 BCE, in Athens, Greece, by the philosopher Plato. Plato wrote many dialogues throughout his life. Along with *The Republic's* focus on the “*theory of forms*,” Plato’s works consist of “discussions in aesthetics, political philosophy, theology, cosmology, epistemology, and the philosophy of language.” (Britannica, 2016). Plato’s discussions have influenced theory and discussion into modern times.

In Figure 1, a pictorial representation of *Allegory of the Cave*, we see labels of the different parts of the piece. The picture itself is rather low quality, and it is interesting to note that it is one of the most commonly appearing pictures when searched for on the internet. With no color in the picture, it pushes the viewer to focus solely on the labels and individual parts. This may mean that the artist believes it is most important for the viewer to focus on those things instead of being distracted by colors, creating representations of meaning that maybe are not there. This would coincide with Plato’s intent in the allegory itself. In the *Allegory of the cave*, prisoners are chained to the ground, incapable of moving their heads to look away from a wall of the cave. The only thing they see are shadows cast by showmen using the light of a fire. One man escapes the cave and finds himself in the real world outside of the cave. At first he is frightened by the multitude of things that surround him. Eventually he comes to realize that his previous reality was a duplication of its real counterparts. Once he makes this realization, he goes back into the cave to tell the other prisoners. Some prisoners, having still only seen shadows on the wall, do not believe him and think he has gone crazy. Those prisoners stay in the cave and continue living in a contrived reality.

Plato's Cave and NNEST in EFL classrooms

In 380BCE, *The Republic*, by philosopher Plato was completed. This piece focused heavily on the concept of societal justice as well as the just man. Within *The Republic*, is Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, a metaphorical story promoting his "theory of forms." Plato posited that "forms" are the real things in the world, where as "things" are an imitation or alternate version of the "form." Things are what we perceive through our senses while forms exist eternally. They are not perceived by our senses. In the story, *Allegory of the Cave*, prisoners are chained inside of a cave, unable to move their heads. They can only look directly forward at a wall that is dimly lit by a fire behind them. Showmen controlling puppets perform in front of the fire, casting shadows of the puppets on the wall for the prisoners to view. Plato uses these shadows on the wall, perceived by the prisoners, to represent "things." To the prisoners, they are real, but they are actually just a simulation of the "form."

Over 2000 years after Plato wrote *Allegory of the Cave*, a French philosopher and self-proclaimed sociologist, Jean Baudrillard published a treatise titled *Simulacra and Simulation*, using Platonic ideas through a 20th century lens. Baudrillard's concept of simulacra mirrors Plato's idea of "form" while simulation mirrors Plato's idea of "things." With the advent of mass media and technology such as the internet, these concepts are increasingly relevant. With so many ways to access a simulation of something, including television and the internet, Baudrillard argues that we are slowly replacing our reality of simulacra with simulation. Pictures that we consume regularly through various forms of media are changing the way we perceive their original form. For example, a pumpkin is now rarely viewed as a squash to be consumed for

nourishment. More often, it is viewed as a Halloween decoration, a sign of Autumn, a jack-o-lantern, or a type of latte sold at many local coffee stands. These ideas, shared by Plato and Baudrillard describe a false reality which we are increasingly accepting as a “form” instead of a “thing.” These ideas can be transferred to the teaching of “native” or “standard” forms of English in ESL/EFL classrooms. In Plato’s *Republic*, he offers the allegory of the cave:

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads? (Gutenberg, org)

As already noted, since the appearance of ESL and EFL classrooms around the globe, countries have most often hired native-English speakers to teach their students English. However, knowledge and studies of NNEST have been on the rise. Although the need for research has always been there, the interest and the amount of research in NNEST studies have recently increased. (Llurda, 2004). With this increase, scholars have focused on the benefits of NNEST for ELLs. This research comes at the same time as other research done on the titles “World English” and “English as an international language” (EIL).

Llurda states:

The transformation of English from being the language of a few powerful countries (i.e. the UK, USA) to becoming the international language it is today has brought with it many changes in the language teaching profession, which is trying to adapt to the new EIL environment and the new demands of its learners. (2004, p. 316-317).

This transformation directly correlates with increasing studies on NNEST. As the NNEST population grows, the need for a different view on how English should be taught compared to how it is often taught grows as well. Along with the language, the norms and

culture taught by native speakers are often inapplicable to the lives of ELLs. Canagarajah captures this idea, stating, “It is not surprising that classroom language based on ‘native’ norms is irrelevant to what students regard as more socially significant needs in their everyday lives.” (2006, p. 592). In my experience as a teacher at three elementary schools in Honjo, Japan, a small, rural city, I experienced this. The “standard” textbook English that students seemed most familiar with and that I was asked to teach felt disconnected from the real needs of my students to garner a true communicative competence in the language. English is constantly evolving, as some research in this paper shows, and the version of English in the textbooks used was often outdated and inapplicable to students’ needs. In some ways it can be compared to the shadows cast on the walls of Plato’s cave. To the students this variety of English, for the most part, is the only one they interact with on a regular basis. Using Plato’s term, it is viewing English as the “thing.” However, it seems more beneficial to expose students to English as the “form.” This is where the role of NNEST gains such a great importance.

The benefits of NNEST in ESL and EFL classrooms are becoming more frequently documented. And, as Llurda claims, “With the increasing establishment of English as the world lingua franca, non-native speakers will be in optimal positions to lead their students into the realm of EIL” (2004, p. 318). One of the reasons for employing NNESTs in ESL/EFL classrooms is their familiarity with switching between languages, which students are learning to do. Paraphrasing Kramsch’s ideas, Llurda writes, “nonnative-speaker teachers are endowed with the privilege of bilingualism, as their experience of switching back and forth from their own language to the target one enhances their understanding of the demands of the learning situation. Non-native

speakers have lived through the process of becoming bilingual and expressing themselves in different languages” (As cited in Llurda, 2004, p. 318). This gives NNEST’s a connection with ELLs that many native English speakers cannot provide.

A parallel can be made here using *Allegory of the Cave*. In a way, ELLs and NNEST are prisoners in the cave. With native English speaking teachers acting as the showmen, they cast a shadow of English on the wall for ELLs to consume. This version of English on the wall is a “standard” form of English which ELLs have to accept from 1st grade as most of them do not see or experience any other form in their daily lives. The NNESTs become like the prisoners that finally escaped from the cave and realized that there are different forms of English than the form projected on the wall of the cave. They realize that English is not just one unchanging thing and thus better understand its uses. They then have the opportunity to return to the cave (ESL/EFL classroom) and relay their reality of different and more meaningful Englishes such as EIL, which is much more applicable to the lives of the ELLs.

Unfortunately, even if NNESTs realize a way in which they can provide students with an understandable and usable form of English, companies and governments that hire them may still require them to teach an outdated and inauthentic version of English. Fairclough claims, “The issue is complex, as teachers may become unwitting instruments of dominant interests. It is true that power can be exercised both through coercion and through consent, and teachers may be consenting in maintaining the power inequality among languages simply by accepting established practices without question” (as cited in Llurda, 2004, p. 318). Challenges such as these are still what face ESL/EFL classrooms today. Assuming that departments of education and English teaching companies truly

want their students to become successful in speaking English and be able to use it in ways helpful to them, the knowledge and acceptance of studies coming out on the role of NNESTs and the development of World English or EIL can be the beginning of a new approach to English language teaching. In countries such as Japan, where MEXT has placed such a focus on teaching communicative competence, it seems their approach to teaching EFL would only benefit from familiarizing themselves with incoming research.

An argument could be made that straying from the “standard” textbook form of English might place less of a focus on certain types of English such as business English, which is a large focus in Japan. However, schools dedicated to teaching business English could keep their curriculum and would not have to be affected by any changes made in EFL classrooms in public schools that are focused on communicative competence. In an ideal situation, ELLs would learn a form of English most relevant to them, and then if they wanted to focus on business they would already be equipped with a form of English that provides them with some fundamentals and motivation to move on to other more authentic materials such as film, documentaries, TED Talks, and music. This may even help with the burnout factor that students encounter when learning a simulation of a target language.

Autoethnography: Canagarajah, Ryan, Lee, Kim, Holland

In the past decade, autoethnographies have appeared in print in English and TESOL professional journals, and a number of master’s theses have been written at Eastern Washington University, following A. Suresh Canagarajah’s “Teacher Development in a Global Profession: An Autoethnography.”

In this ethnographic self-reconstruction, the author represents the ways in which he negotiated the differing teaching practices and professional cultures of the periphery and the center in an effort to develop a strategic professional identity. He brings out the importance of using multiple identities critically for voice in the wider professional discourses and practices:

As global English acquires local identities, and diverse professional communities develop their own socially situated pedagogical practices, it is becoming important to chart a constructive relationship between these communities in TESOL. Through his journey of professionalization, the author explores the framework of relationships that would enable an effective negotiation of practices and discourses between the different professional communities and facilitate more constructive teacher identities. (2012, p. 258)

Christopher Ryan (2012)—in *A novice ESL teacher's experience of language learning in France: an autoethnographic study of anomie and the 'Vulnerable Self'*—for example, wrote about his challenges studying in France at the end of the program and reflected on his own learning experiences while reformulating his teaching philosophy:

The writer summarizes language-learning experiences in Quebec and France while focusing on his second study abroad experience in France, where he encountered an educational system that was inconsistent with his training as a language teacher and his learning style as a language learner. He discusses challenges he faced in a language institute he was required to enroll in before he could matriculate in the university. Rote memorization and test preparation were the primary focuses of two classes, but the other

three were more engaging. The author contrasts his teaching philosophy with the learning arrangements he experienced in his third study abroad experience. (p. iii)

It is important to note that Japan isn't the only country teaching a foreign language with a focus on rote memorization and test preparation. These types of language classes may still be found all over the globe. One reason is likely that CLT is still less than 50 years old, and more education systems and teachers need to familiarize themselves with it in order to implement it effectively.

Sangho Lee (2012), wrote in his master's thesis:

Lee introduces the communal diary, “**날지킴**” (naljeogi), seldom discussed in the literature about the role of first language (L1) writing in Korean university education. Lee's diary study/autoethnography was designed (1) to reflect on the novice ESL teacher's education—both in Korea and in the United States; (2) to present and analyze selected pieces of the diarist's own second language (L2) writing done in a two-year period during graduate studies in the United States in order to discover his strengths and challenges in L2 writing; and (3) to discover how the author's ethnic identity and cultural values emerged through intensive and sustained L2 writing across genres in the graduate program requiring intensive and extensive writing as well as reflection—as stated in the learning outcomes on the EWU website.

As Lee included more than 20 artifacts of his own writing throughout the master's program, he discovered themes and "common threads in his writing...: cultural values (family, work, and education), historical references, self-blame, growth, and change within the diarist which he considers 'subtle and latent.' At the same time, the diarist also discusses the more obvious transformative elements of being educated in both countries" (p. iii). What is most compelling about Lee's thesis is his deep and sustained response "to Nunan and Cho's (2010) call for teacher narratives about their own language learning and teaching" (p. iii). Lee "exposes those parts of the diarist that Trahar calls the 'vulnerable self' (2009)" (p. iii). From both theses, as language teachers, we have a better understanding of "language acquisition, ethnic identity, and the role of multi-genre writing in transformative education at the graduate level in the United States" (p. iii). Delaney Holland (2015) wrote her thesis, *Don't Wake Me, My Desk is Far Too Comfortable: An Autoethnography of a Novice ESL Teacher's First Year of Teaching in Japan*, about a girls' private school in Nishinomiya, Japan:

[She tells 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. (p. iii)

Through Holland's autoethnography, she realized the importance of cultural relativity and created an artifact that can be used as the base for future research.

Chapter 3

Literacy Narrative and Autoethnography

Chapter 3 is the researcher's (1) literacy narrative focusing on his learning to read and coming to love the English language and (2) autoethnography detailing one year of teaching in three elementary schools in Honjo City, in Saitama Prefecture, which is northwest of Tokyo.

Soliday Defines Literacy Narrative

In "Translating self and difference through literacy narratives," Mary Soliday (1993) reminds *College English* readers nearly 25 years ago that "Frederik Douglass's *Narrative* and Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundaries* or novels, plays, and films" (p. 511) are literacy narratives as are other stories that deal with language acquisition, hardships survived by those trying to come to full literacy and sometimes falling short of school readiness—both culturally and linguistically (Reeves, 1997, 2017). Yet other examples of literacy narratives, Soliday suggests, include Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory*. Soliday encourages English teachers to follow the models and to tell their own stories because literacy narratives often include "ordinary people's conversations about their daily lives, as recorded, for instance, in Lorri Neilsen's ethnographic study *Literacy and Living*, and in the classroom talk and writing of students" (511). Her goal in this seminal article was "to focus upon how various literacy narratives portray passages between language worlds in order to consider the relevance of such passages to a writing pedagogy, particularly to a pedagogy for basic writing classes" (p. 511).

Literacy Narrative

“I found it!” I told my mom, as I slammed my finger on the page. I yelled it like it was the first time I found the frog that was hidden in every page of my favorite childhood book, although it was more like the hundredth. *When a Bear Bakes a Cake*, by Jasper Tomkins, was my first remembered encounter with a book. When I was four years old, before bed time, my mom and I would lay in my bed and go slowly through the pages of the story. I savored every page of illustration, which was full of warm watercolors and charming characters. The text was simple, providing just enough information to allow me to follow the story of two lovable bears as they got themselves into silly predicaments. At that age though, the most appealing part of the story wasn’t the narrative. It was the little green frog hidden in each page. I think I liked the concept of the hidden frog because I would often hide from my parents and wait for them to find me. Sometimes, especially when it involved asking store clerks for me to come to the front desk, it wasn’t as fun for my parents.

As far as reading went, though, magazines and books that had pictures and hidden items constituted most of my engagement with text up until I was about nine, when I discovered the 100-page *Berenstain Bears* adventure books. Fondly, I look back on memories of conquering those tales. “I read 100 whole pages!”, I thought to myself. After completing one, I would slowly flip through it backwards, letting my finger touch each leaf of slightly coarse paper, beaming with pride. Eventually, I grew out of the phase in which I thought *Berenstain Bears* were “cool” and went through a lull in my reading habits. Years went by with no texts gaining my attention until one memorable day during my sixth-grade year at Elementary school. Moran Prairie, where I spent six years learning

how to function as a human, was holding its annual Scholastic Book Fair. These book fairs weren't often on my radar of interest, but this particular one boasted a special book that would turn out to be one of the most widely read children books of all time. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* had a shelf completely to its own. The red cardboard shelf it sat on matched perfectly with the accent colors on the hardback copy that gained all of my attention. The book had the entire school abuzz. The cover of the book had golden raised lettering and a coarse texture. I can still feel my finger dragging across the book title, an aesthetic that played a large role in an attempt at convincing my parents to buy the book for me. More than any other artifact consisting of text, the first three *Harry Potter* books in the series gave me the most joy I've ever received from something in a book. In the night time, I would find just the right spot on my water bed, slowly open a *Harry Potter* book, and let my imagination run wild. Although I didn't always have my head in a book, the experiences I had reading through elementary school were, for the most part, positive. Going into middle school, this would change.

Middle school is infamous for being an awkward time in life. My experience in middle school wasn't any different. Besides the typical battle with where to fit in and how to deal with the other sex, I found myself in an interesting position in my education. Some of my friends were taking honors classes while I was not. Seventh-grade brought a daunting challenge by the name of Accelerated Reading (AR). Accelerated Reading tests were nothing short of frightening. They required all students to read three accepted books from the school library and take quizzes on each. The quizzes, between 10 to 18 questions long, asked questions requiring knowledge of specific happenings in the book. I still, for one reason or another, vividly remember taking a quiz on a book titled *The Ear*,

The Eye, and The Arm. Unfortunately, the only vivid memory I have of that book is its cover. I sadly can't recollect anything that happened in it. This may be telling of how successful the AR system was for me. Middle school was the beginning of a period of great dislike for reading and books in general.

Through four years attending high school, I found that although I didn't often enjoy completing assigned readings, I really did enjoy English. Even with the struggles of a low motivation to read, I was comfortable with my control of writing the language, which made me enjoy English classes. I appreciate my high school English classes for being the first school related experiences to show me that critical thinking and student ideas were actually important. Towards the end of my high school career, when students were deciding what they wanted to do moving forward, I didn't recognize my enjoyment and connection with English classes as something I wanted to explore more. I spent three years bouncing back and forth between two community colleges. During this time I tried to figure out what I had an interest in. I flirted with the idea of becoming a nurse because my mom used to tell me, "Kevin, you're very caring and compassionate. You'd make a great nurse." After further looking into the academic path that I would have to take to become a nurse, however, I was apprehensive. I would have had to take multiple math and science classes, and those were never my strong suit. For some reason I never thought to myself, "You enjoy English, Kevin. Why don't you make that a career?" After spending three years not knowing what I wanted to pursue for a career, my final year in community college presented me with very special opportunity. Through my sociology class I was able to volunteer at Moran Prairie elementary school, my old stomping grounds, working in a first-grade classroom and a student workroom for students

struggling in certain subjects. I wasn't too dissimilar to some of the students who came in to the workroom lacking the motivation to read. I found it awkward sometimes trying to show them the importance of reading while I myself rarely read for pleasure and struggled to complete required readings. Ultimately though, this experience exposed me to how powerful helping students in the classroom can be. Although I was helping students with all subjects and still had not come to the realization that I wanted to focus on English, it was an important step in getting to where I am now. Having been put in a classroom and given the respect of a teacher, I felt a strong sense of purpose for the first time. After that opportunity, I felt I was ready to attend a university and explore the option of majoring in education and becoming a teacher.

In the process of becoming an education major at Eastern Washington University, I got sidetracked by Evelyn Renshaw's visit to my linguistics class. Evelyn was, at the time, the Asia University America Program (AUAP) director at EWU. The AUAP program invites students from Asia University, in Tokyo, Japan, to come study English and live at EWU. During Evelyn's visit, she asked students to come volunteer in AUAP classes, where Japanese ELLs studied American history, culture, and English. After her speech I was interested in volunteering, and when my Linguistics professor, Dr. Tracey McHenry, offered extra-credit to students who did, I took Evelyn's offer, and it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Two years of volunteering and working for AUAP later, I was finishing up my degree with a minor in English as a Second Language (ESL). I also had started learning Japanese because I had such a great experience working with Japanese students. Taking Japanese classes helped me recognize just how unique and special the English language is. I didn't end up graduating with a bachelor's in education

but instead in Interdisciplinary Studies with focuses on English, TESL, and education. The major reason for my change in majors was that I would graduate one year earlier. And at that time I knew what I wanted to do after graduation. I wanted to teach English in Japan, which only required any bachelor's degree. This led me to Honjo, Japan.

With my finally found appreciation for the English language and a desire to help Japanese students learn English, I took a job teaching English in Japan at three elementary schools. I made friends, became more proficient at Japanese, expanded my teaching techniques, and learned a great amount about myself. It was wild. After a year of living and teaching in Japan, I came back to the U.S to pursue a Master's degree. As someone who had taught English for a year in a foreign country and spent time in an American grade school, I felt prepared for what was to come in my graduate program and the teaching aspect that came along with it, as I was accepted to a competitive position as an English instructor for low-level English classes at EWU.

As people who have attended a graduate program know, it is often requires a lot of work, time, and reading. As I am now concluding my first year of graduate school, I'm realizing that the struggles I had in finding motivation to read when I was younger have manifested themselves again. Reading and learning to read thoughtfully and critically is a process. As I tell my English 101 students how to read critically and engage in the material, I realize I almost feel fraudulent, still struggling to do this in my own graduate classes. However, when I think about how much frustration and discomfort my aversion to assigned readings caused while teaching struggling elementary school students seven years ago and now with my English 101 students, I can't help but to let a William Glasser quote seep into my mind.

“We Learn . . .

10% of what we read

20% of what we hear

30% of what we see

50% of what we see and hear

70% of what we discuss

80% of what we experience

95% of what we teach others.” – William Glasser

I am grateful to be able to tell this story as my own. I know I will continue to struggle engaging in certain reading assignments and sometimes feel awkward advising my students to read more on their own time, but I am now aware of these struggles, and the joy given to me by the English language, and the encouragement of watching my students learn outweighs my struggles. My journey of learning how to engage in reading started about 23 years ago. I’m still on that journey today, and I’m content knowing that I may be on that journey for years to come.

Autoethnography

Honjo, Japan is where my former company, Joytalk, placed me to teach. Located about two hours Northwest of Tokyo by train, Honjo is a rural city of about 80,000 people, and most famous for its agriculture. It’s a quiet city. And because of how sprawled out it is, it often felt much smaller than 80,000 people. Coming from Spokane Washington, which is larger, but still quiet, I was comfortable in Honjo. And when I wanted to explore neighboring cities, it was easy. My apartment stood about one mile from the train station, which was an easy five-minute ride by bicycle.



Figure 2. Honjo Station South Entrance

Chuo Elementary School

Chuo Elementary School is the school I spent the most time at. It was a leisurely five minute bike ride from my small apartment to its doors. On my ride there I passed a high school buzzing with students dressed in black and white school uniforms. I would often greet groups of them. Once I was almost to Chuo, I would see groups of elementary students, all of them wearing white hardhats and accompanied by adults to make sure they made it school safely. There wasn't any construction going on near the school, and in fact it's quite common to see elementary students wearing hard hats in Japan. I learned that if a city had a certain amount of industries requiring large trucks to traffic the streets then students were required to wear hard hats. As I passed them I greeted them, often

receiving an excited response of “Kebin Sensei!” Arriving at the bike rack, I would park my bike and walk to the entrance of the school, remove my shoes, as I did at all schools, and put on my pair of inside shoes which is required in all schools as well as other public places. Right after removing my shoes, I would often greet the principal of the school whose office was next to the entrance. Then I was off to the teachers’ room.

The morning is when the teachers’ room was most bustling. Teachers were preparing items and lessons for the day while also discussing school matters with other teachers and sometimes preparing to go outside to spend time with the kids who were running laps in the activity area behind the school. On the days I didn’t have to meet with any of my co-teachers to discuss lesson plans, I would quickly switch back to my outside shoes and head outside for some running. I would either sprint around the track, passing students and encouraging them to run faster, or walk the opposite way they were running and give out high fives. While running laps, students were dressed in white shirts and blue shorts with a colored hat that corresponded to their grade. Before entering the school for 1st period students would line up with their homeroom teacher and do coordinated stretches to a song that was played over the megaphone attached to the school. At this time I would either go back to the teachers’ room and prepare a lesson or go to the English classroom and set up for the day. Each school I taught at had a designated English teacher who I kept in close communication with. Yuki Sensei, the English teacher at Chuo, was very kind and helpful. She’d spent time in Australia as a tourist and liked to discuss American music. If I had any questions about materials or lesson plans, I would ask her for help. Being able to discuss lesson plans in English was very helpful for me as my Japanese was at a basic level. There was one other teacher, Wanikawi Sensei,

who spoke fluent English and had spent a couple years outside of the U.S. She was who I would talk to if I had questions about Japanese culture and customs, which I had plenty. At one point during the school year I had an excruciating pain in one of my teeth. I attempted to teach while in pain, but it was too much. She helped me talk to the school nurse and eventually the dentist I visited multiple times.

In the Classroom:

Chuo elementary had a designated classroom devoted to English class. It was fully decorated in English words and pictures of English speaking countries. There were about 25 chairs in the back of the class as well as cubbies for students to put their belongings in. Like every other room in the building, the English room had a door providing access to a small balcony area. This door was only opened for monthly cleaning of the balcony or emergency situations. The front of the class had a chalkboard, a desk, and a cabinet in which to store materials. On the desk was a stereo used to play all of the English songs. The chalkboard was utilized for writing and as a space to stick flashcards and pictures during class. The room was on the third floor of the second wing of the school. The third floor was seldom used, removed from the bustle of young children on the lower floors. It was a pleasant location that provided me a small view of nearby buildings.

While teaching at Chuo I taught fifth- and sixth-grade twice a week and a lower predetermined grade once a week. Fifth-grade used a book titled *Hi Friends 1* and sixth-grade used *Hi Friends 2*. These books provide basic English activities that required students to exercise their speaking, writing, listening, and reading abilities. The writing required was very minimal, usually only asking for a small phrase or simple vocabulary

words. Almost every class period began with a song. Typically it was *Skidamarink*, a popular preschool song in many Anglophone countries. The version we listened to was changed to include basic English greetings. The students and I would dance and sing to the song. Though, the sixth-graders had been hearing the song for many years previous to my appearance there, however, and sometimes seemed a little unenthusiastic. Because of this, I tried to spice up the song by adding different greetings for the students to sing.

In the song, *Skidamarink*, one verse of lyrics is “skidamarink-adink-adink skidamarink-ado. How are you?” While singing the song with the students, I would take large flashcards depicting a character with different emotions such as tired, hungry, happy, etc..., and put them up on the chalkboard. Without the music, I would help the students practice each emotion by asking “how are you?” and then pointing to an emotion I wanted them to say. Once students were comfortable with saying the emotions, I would start the song and have them do the same activity. Then they were free to use whichever emotion they wanted to say. This helped the students to better enjoy the song.

Kitaizumi Elementary



Figure 3. Teaching a 1st grade class at Kitaizumi Elementary School

Kitaizumi elementary school was about 12 minutes from my apartment by bike. I would actually ride past Chuo elementary school and greet some of the students on my way to Kitaizumi. This elementary school was quite near to the Shinkansen (high-speed train) station, and therefore at times it seemed to hum a little louder than the other two schools. And although it was near to some very populated areas, on the other side of the school lays quiet farmland. I only taught at Kitaizumi once a week and twice every other week. The English teacher, Aoi Sensei, whom I worked with in lesson planning, was a very kind younger man who hadn't traveled outside of Japan, but seemed eager to do so. He was very engaging and complimentary of my lesson ideas. He loved soccer as I do, and

we bonded over discussions of European soccer teams and playing soccer with students at recess. In the spring time he even picked me up from my apartment and took me to play futsal with him and a few other of his friends. I felt extremely honored to be invited to join them.

Just like the other two schools, at Kitaizumi, I worked mostly with the 5th and 6th graders and did a lesson with a lower grade once or twice a week. First-graders at Kitaizumi were probably the most affectionate group of students I worked with in Japan. When I was assigned to go eat school lunch with the 1st graders, I would be greeted at the door to the classroom by twenty-some students attempting to cling on to me all at the same time. Although I would be rendered temporarily immobile by the students, it was a lot of fun. While eating our food I would occasionally make funny faces and it would cause a roar of laughter that filled the room. As the students grow older they become more reserved so I tried to really enjoy those carefree and fun moments with the younger students.

Because I spent less time at Kitaizumi than Chuo, I tried to become very involved with the students at recess, making them feel more comfortable with me. Having fun with them on the playground really did seem to correlate with their engagement in classes. Just like Chuo's English room, Kitaizumi's was on the third floor, but much nearer to an occupied classroom than Chuo's English room. Thus, I would constantly get students running by the room greeting me energetically during passing periods. The English class had a beautiful view of the hillside that the Shinkansen traveled along. During passing periods, I enjoyed watching the trains race in and out of the station in the distance.

Every year in Honjo the elementary schools take field trips to a nearby area to have a leisurely day filled with fun activities. Kitaizumi was the school I went on the field trip with. We left early in the morning and walked about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to a giant park I didn't even know existed. It had a baseball stadium as well as two playground areas with jungle gyms and vast open spaces for students to run around in. I played tag, dodgeball, arm wrestling, and many other activities that day. I spent the beginning of our time at the park running around with first- and second-graders, climbing up and down one of the play structures, sliding quickly down the slides, and running some more. Later, during a grueling game of dodgeball I made the mistake of looking away from the game and received a ball directly in my face. The students and I laughed as I fixed my glasses, placing them back on my face. Between the playground and dodgeball area sat a few tables occupied by giggling and smiling faces. Amazaki Sensei was challenging students to arm wrestling matches. I decided to join in on the fun and challenge a 3rd grader. It was a playful arm wrestling match that went back and forth ending in me letting up and allowing the student to win.

Lunch that day for all of the teachers was an obento box, a common premade lunch in Japan consisting of different popular food items. The students brought lunches from home. We sought cool refuge from the warm rays of the sun under some large canopied trees and ate our lunches. It was very hot out that day and through either an error of communication or someone forgetting to tell me that we would be going on a field trip that day I ran around the entire time with a pair of dress pants and a dress shirt. By the end of the field trip I was soaked in sweat but had such a good time with the kids that I didn't even notice until my bike ride home.

In the classroom:

One experience teaching at Kitaizumi really stands out in my mind. I was working with fifth-graders one day and their fifth-grade teacher, Amazaki Sensei, was a comical man who joked around with his students a great deal. I didn't see a lot of that between teachers and students while teaching in Honjo, so it was quite refreshing. Being the comical person he was, he actually teased me while I was teaching a lesson on foreign countries in the textbook. He would repeat the country names out loud in an exaggerated American accent. It actually caught me off guard, and at first I didn't know how to take it, but I rolled with it and it ended up being one of the most fun and interactive classes that year. I later thanked him for lightening the mood in the class. Another great memory I have is orchestrating a class wide rock-paper-scissors game with a 6th grade class. Rock-paper-scissors, or "Janken," is extremely popular in Japan. I even found an article on the internet in which rock paper scissors was used to settle a large financial transaction in Japan. Students would often use it as a way to decide who would do something neither of them wanted to do, such as certain chores during cleaning time. Because of the familiarity and enjoyment of rock-paper-scissors, the class wide game was a hit. Every student stood up and everyone did rock-paper-scissors in the air. I did it while in the front of the class, and if they beat me they kept standing. If they lost they sat down. Eventually, it would come down to one student who would come up to the front of the class and duel me in front of the rest of the students. Students were so excited to play this game that I

actually did it with the other higher grades as a way to have a fun activity to reward them for their hard work in the classroom.

While teaching at Kitaizumi I experienced the only behavioral issue in the classroom during my entire time in Japan. During a fourth-grade class, two students started acting out and attempted to remove themselves from classroom activities by turning their chairs around and facing away from me. In Japanese culture, facing away from someone while they are talking to you is considered very disrespectful, especially if they are older or have a higher status in society. Multiple times while I was teaching something they would speak loudly and distract other students. I let the homeroom teacher, Okura Sensei, deal with the two students. She began communicating with them in a stern voice. Because my Japanese level was low, it was difficult to know what she was saying to them. I asked her after class what the problem might be, but because of language barrier, I never fully understood the answer she gave me. Because it was such a rare occasion for students to cause a problem in class I took it as a challenge to try to connect with these two students outside of class. Instead of playing soccer at recess with the 6th graders, like I usually did, I would play dodgeball with the two students. I don't know if my showing of interest in them was the deciding factor in an improvement in their behavior in the class, but they were never as disruptive again.

Asahi Elementary



Figure 4. Asahi Elementary School 6th grade class. (Thank you, Kevin Teacher)

I thoroughly enjoyed teaching at all three of my schools and always felt welcomed, but possibly because Asahi Elementary was a smaller school, I felt a certain closeness to it. Asahi was about a 20 minute bike ride from my apartment. Passing through busy streets, train crossings, and long open roads surrounded by fields, it was a perfect way to start a day. The length of the bike ride gave me ample time to think about how lucky I was to have the unique opportunity of living and teaching English in Japan. Asahi was the

smallest school I worked at and was surrounded almost solely by fields. The principal and vice principal of the schools were extremely kind to me and excited to have me working with the students. Vice Principal Kazuhiro, who had spent some time outside of Japan, was always eager to converse with me about things unrelated to school. To receive so much friendliness from the two people with the most authority in the school was an amazing feeling. Almost every teacher at Asahi was approachable and would engage me in conversation. As an outgoing American I realized how important this was to me, especially living in another country where I wasn't fluent in the native language. Takata Sensei, The English teacher at Asahi, was a rather quiet person, but she was very helpful in directing me towards where I would find the English materials as well as providing me with a schedule of which teacher I'd would be working with on a given day. Because of Asahi's size, the schedule wasn't as fixed as the other schools, especially in the beginning of the year. The school actually didn't have an English classroom, which meant I would transfer all of my teaching materials from classroom to classroom, usually with the help of a couple students. But entering into their classrooms gave me a better sense of their work and lives outside of an English classroom. The insight into their lives was helpful for me to connect with them.

Like Kitaizumi, I only worked at Asahi once a week and twice every other week. Although I didn't see the students as much as I saw the students at Chuo, I happened to be there for many assemblies and school-wide meetings. In one specific assembly all of the teachers got the chance to introduce themselves and bow to the visiting parents of students. It was a crowded assembly room and at the front was a line with all of the teachers, myself included. We all took turns stepping forward, saying our names, and

delivering the very popular Japanese phrase, “yoroshiku onegaishimasu.”

(よろしくお願ひします) The phrase translates into English different ways for different purposes. It is used like a “nice to meet you,” but can also be used as “please be kind to me.” I was so proud to be included in the introductions, as I was not full-time faculty, but it’s an example of how Asahi included me and made me feel I belonged. I didn’t feel like a foreigner visiting Japan as a tourist.

At Asahi I got the chance to be involved in their table tennis club, which happened twice a month. Table tennis club was a great chance for me to interact with the students. I grew up playing table tennis in the basement of my house and have always loved the game. There were about 20 students in the club and only 3 tables to play on, so much time was spent helping keep score of games or just spectating. Yamamoto Sensei, one of the 3rd grade teachers, led the club. During club time I acted as more of a participant than a supervisor. I enjoyed this role because it placed me on the same level of the students, putting aside the fact that I was their teacher.

In the classroom:

With no classroom designated classroom for English in Asahi, it was sometimes stressful scurrying from one classroom to the next with all of my materials. But I became used to it. I started each class period with a song, as I did in the other schools. Each class had a CD player/stereo. I just carried the CD full of English songs from room to room. Asahi was the school where I tried out many new songs to see how students would react to them. Along with “Skidamarink” that I played at all the schools, I took a couple songs from the textbooks *Hi Friends 1* and *Hi Friends 2*. One of the songs from *Hi Friends 1* became very popular in the classrooms at Asahi. The song “I like apples” was pretty

basic, just requiring the students to sing “I like apples, bananas, grapes,” etc... The first time I did this song they enjoyed it to a certain degree, but I decided to add designated dance moves that I assigned to each fruit. An exciting feature included in both *Hi Friends* books was an audio CD that had the ability to play all of the songs at slow, medium, and fast speeds. As a class we started out at the slow speed until students were comfortable with the dance moves. Then we went to medium speed, then fast. By the time we got to fast, students were having a blast because the dance moves were quite silly and trying to complete them at such a quick pace often ended in a comical chaos that everyone in the classroom enjoyed.

Let's Chant 1  I like apples.



Let's Listen 1  だれが何を好きなのか。線で結ぼう。



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Figure 5. *Hi Friends 1*: “I like” activity page

The “I like apples” became such a hit around the school that many classes requested that we do it at the beginning of every class.

Even though Asahi was the smallest school I taught at, it had the most highly populated 4th grade classes. In both 4th grade classes there were about 40 students. This is by far the most students I’ve taught at one time. These classes were intimidating because I would enter the classroom to 40 4th graders all doing something different at their desks, then quickly placing their attention on me. The back row of the class seemed like it was a quarter of a mile away from me, forcing me to speak more loudly and clearly once class was in session. The size of the classroom was conducive to playing many games and activities. Even during games though, it was often difficult to monitor participation of the whole classroom at one time. However, I usually conducted group or partner games that were more easily monitored and enjoyable for the students. A game that I played multiple times in Asahi classrooms was called “Keshigomu,” or in English, “eraser.” This game required students to partner up with another person and place an eraser directly between them. I would then write words and phrases on the chalkboard, practicing the pronunciation of all of them. Then I would circle a certain word or phrase and that would be the keyword to be used for the game. The goal of the game is to grab the eraser before the other person can once the keyword is said. In order to allow ample pronunciation practice I would start clapping my hands lightly, creating a tempo for students to repeat all words and phrases on the board after me. I would often have them repeat almost all vocabulary words before finally saying the keyword. When I finally said the keyword, I got the pleasure of watching 40 students slam their hands on erasers all at the same time, followed by cheers and groans. Conducting this game was always immense fun because

of how competitive some of the students became over simply grabbing an eraser. The game was fun, but it also gave great pronunciation practice.

In the spring at Asahi there were a few event days involving bike safety, music assemblies, and class observation days for parents. Taka Sensei, one of the 4th grade teachers and I worked together to create an interactive lesson focused on greetings and introductions using *Hi Friends 1* to deliver in front of some of the visiting parents. It was often difficult to work together with my co-teachers because of my low Japanese level and how busy they were with their own lesson planning. But because of the occasion of parents visiting the classroom, we spent extra time planning together. When it came time to teach the lesson, even with the anxiety of twenty some parents staring at us as we delivered it, we worked well together and delivered a smooth lesson, pleasing the parents. Winning the approval of the parents that day provided me with an excellent boost of confidence moving forward into the end of the year.

Difficulties

As a newcomer to Japanese culture and classroom customs, I was inevitably going to struggle at times as a teacher and as a temporary citizen. I had no official teaching experience prior to my time in Japan. With the teacher training I received from Joytalk one week before I started teaching, I prepared myself mentally for some difficult times but remained optimistic.

Not all of my struggles happened in the classroom. In fact, probably the biggest difficulty I faced while at my schools was eating the school lunches provided to all faculty and students. In America, teachers have the freedom to bring whatever they

would like for lunch, and they get to eat it on their own time, alone or with other teachers. Japan is very different in this sense. When lunch time came at my schools, the person in charge of preparing lunches, who also had other various jobs such as groundskeeping and cleaning, delivered the lunches to the teachers' room. I was always in the teachers' room at this time, so my lunch was put right in front of me. However, I was not able to eat the lunch until the class I was designated to eat with on any given day was ready to summon me to their classroom. When that time came, a boy and a girl from that class would come to the teachers' room and escort me to the classroom. I always enjoyed walking with the students back to their classroom, making small talk about the food, but the problem for me was the two students usually came to pick me up about 45 minutes after my food had been put in front of me. Once we reached the classroom, students still needed to finish divvying out the food items onto their trays. This took an extra 10 minutes. In total, my food usually sat out for about an hour before I was able to consume it. When I went to Japan, I knew that I didn't care for most popular Japanese foods such as fish, seaweed, and various fish based soups. However, I thought I could adjust to these dietary changes quickly enough. Unfortunately, when food I already didn't care for sat in front of me for an hour, cooling in temperature, it only added to the lack of enjoyment of my food. To add to my problem, it was expected that everyone finish their entire meal. Choosing not to eat a specific item was considered rude and therefore not an option for a foreign teacher trying to fit in in a new environment. Food wise, my saving grace of the week was on Thursdays when all schools had Italian food day. All of the schools were on the same weekly food schedule, so no matter which school I taught at, on Thursday, I could look forward to a meal I would actually enjoy. Having one lunch a week that I could look

forward to was better than none. However, the lukewarm meals of food I often didn't care for in the first place really took a toll on me.

After about 3 months of eating school lunches I disliked, I had an encounter with the secretary of one of the schools, Mato Sensei. Mato Sensei and I got along well and often talked about American football, which he used to play until badly injuring his leg and ending his career. After a particularly difficult to eat lunch of lukewarm miso ramen, seaweed, and daikon, a popular Japanese radish, Mato Sensei happily asked me, "Kyuushoku oishi?" Which in English is a casual way of saying, "was the lunch delicious?" It took immense willpower for me not to laugh out loud in that moment. I had such trouble finishing the lunch that day that the thought of me saying "yes" to that question was comical. However, with a slight grin, holding back a laugh, I said "yes" because it was the right thing to say in that moment. Even with my dislike for the food, it was important for me to keep my composure and provide Mato Sensei with that response because it was the expected one. If I had said "no," I would have stood out and teachers possibly would have become worried about me. I didn't want either of those things. That being said, that night I Skyped my parents who live in Spokane, WA, and broke down. I complained to them about how difficult it was for me to eat the food, and they did their best to console me. My dislike for the food had finally gotten to me. It was that night that I felt the most homesick my entire time in Japan. Admittedly, I realize this seems like a rather trivial problem for a person to have living in a foreign country, but for me it was extremely difficult.

Surprisingly, shortly after a two-day bout with homesickness over food, I experienced an unexpected change. Towards the end of winter, for one reason or another

my taste buds started accepting and even enjoying school lunches. It must have been either that I had finally accepted my reality, or my taste buds were becoming used to the food. Either way, I was elated. I was no longer dreading eating school lunches. The fish, even though it was sometimes cold, was tasty. The seaweed covering my scoop of rice was even almost delicious. I felt like a new person and a bit more Japanese. There were still a couple lunches that I didn't care for, but overall I'd overcome the biggest challenge I faced in Japan.

Another sizeable challenge I faced while in Japan pertained to lesson planning. My company expected me to work with my co-teacher to lesson plan together for each class period. However, I found out immediately how difficult that was going to be. Upon arriving every day at school I would enter the teachers' room greeted by 20 teachers frantically working on many different school related activities. Besides the lesson planning and classroom material creation, teachers were often involved in other activities related to the school. For example, Yuki Sensei, the English teacher at Chuo was in charge of decorating the school for different celebrations and holidays. In American schools, Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) will often volunteer their time to fulfill duties such as school decorations for events. But Japanese teachers, complete all of these duties on top of their already full loads of work. Because of this, it was very difficult for me to feel comfortable asking my co-teachers for even ten minutes of their time. I always felt as if I was inconveniencing them a great deal. Had my level of Japanese proficiency been higher, this might not have been the case.

Before arriving in Japan I had heard multiple thoughts on what Japanese level foreign teachers should have. When I applied for a job with my company they were

asking for a minimum knowledge and speaking ability of “basic” Japanese. I had also heard different ALTs and employers say that having a high level of Japanese may cause issues because ALTs fluent in Japanese may want to speak Japanese in the classroom which went against what most Japanese schools want. They prefer English classes to be entirely in English, which is understandable, even though at times I felt like a quick translation would have saved some class time. With a low level of Japanese, meetings with my co-teachers were often quick and involved me pointing to somewhere in the book or at whatever material I was using. This was followed by an attempt at explaining my ideas in Japanese. Overall, my co-teachers seldom objected to any lesson plan ideas I had. I still wonder if this was strictly because they believed I was the English “expert” and did not want to interfere with my plans, or if it was just because they were so busy themselves that it was easier to let me take care of the lesson planning. Either way, sometimes the result of these quick lesson plan meetings resulted in less modeling of the material for the students. For example, if we were teaching a lesson on greetings, my co-teacher and I would attempt to model it, but sometimes the example conversation between us did not always go as expected and at times caused a little confusion. I do not have too many regrets about my teaching experience in Japan, but this is one of them. Although I was a novice teacher and knew everything would not go perfectly, it pains me to think that this probably could have been avoided had I just been more proficient in speaking in Japanese.

Chapter 4

Addressing Assumptions and Research Questions

Chapter 4 is (1) a discussion of and reflections on the assumptions the researcher made prior to beginning the project, as well as (2) answers to the research questions providing insights into Japanese culture.

Assumptions

1) I will have to follow Japanese teachers' procedures, teach their materials, and adapt to approaches to language teaching.

From my time volunteering with Asia University America Program (AUAP) on EWU's campus, I'd heard that middle and high school English education in Japan was focused much more on grammar than communicative competencies. I assumed that my role as a teacher would at least focus partially on promoting grammatical competency. However, after a couple training sessions provided by my company, which introduced many popular fun games to produce enjoyment of the English language, I wasn't sure exactly what my teaching experience would be like. After my first week of teaching I realized that the year ahead of me would be full of games and songs rather than spelling and syntax. The books used by 5th and 6th grade were colorful books packed with fun activities that mostly included practice of basic English phrases. I knew that I would be co-teaching in all of my classes, which also led me to believe that for the most part the teachers would have a set plan for us to follow and a way to teach the materials. This was not the case. It was quite surprising how much freedom they allowed me in creating lessons. The only true goal each school had for me was to teach all of the concepts and

phrases in the textbooks. With the size of the book and as much time as we had, finishing it was never a concern.

2) Japanese colleagues will be there to mentor me and walk me through everything.

Although my Japanese colleagues were always willing to help if they had time, there was very minimal mentoring. Only once at each school was I observed by a kind woman named Shimizo San, an employee for my company. She offered lesson suggestions and provided me with feedback. But besides those encounters, I wasn't mentored.

Research Questions

- 1) What changes did I experience while there and after my return?
 - a. Was there an adjustment period there?
 - i. How did I handle it?
 - ii. What went well?
 - iii. What was the hardest?

When living in a different country than one is most familiar with, there is always an adjustment period. For some Americans living in Japan, this adjustment period may be more difficult than for others.

One year previous to my year teaching in Japan, I had gone there for 11 days just to visit some friends I had made during my volunteer work with AUAP. I got a glimpse into what life would be like if I were to live and work there. However, it truly was only a

glimpse because someone can only begin to understand a new culture after having spent just 11 days in it.

After arriving in Japan, I was greeted by a friend from EWU who was living there. He invited me to stay for a couple days at his apartment before Joytalk held its week-long training session in the beginning of each school year. I felt pretty comfortable in my new environment until about three days into the training session. I remember sitting in a session thinking to myself, “What am I doing here?” A wave of anxiety came over me for about 12 hours. Luckily, it subsided after going to sleep. When the training session was over, each Joytalk ALT was taken to the apartment they would be living in for the next year. Every ALT got their own apartment. Throughout my life, I had only lived by myself for about 6 months in total, so this in itself was an adjustment I had to make. Culturally, a major adjustment I struggled with was the lack of communication with strangers and people outside of school that I came into contact with on a daily basis.

As an outgoing person, I often make small-talk with people I don’t know, but in Japan those interactions aren’t common. But by far the biggest adjustment I had to make was a dietary one. I never cared much for seafood, but at my schools and faculty outings seafood was abundant, and as noted earlier, leaving food on the plate is considered even more impolite than it is in America. At most faculty outings the food was chosen for us, and it was often very unappetizing to me. Luckily, I eventually became used to some of the popular foods, but it was not an easy transition.

2) What did I learn?

a. Japanese people

- b. Customs
- c. Education

In my experiences meeting and communicating with Japanese people in and outside of my schools, I learned how polite and non-intrusive people were. At my schools, my Japanese colleagues thanked each other multiple times during every conversation. This was even more the case when they were addressing someone with a higher-ranking position in the school. Outside of my schools, in restaurants and bars, I found that even though I was American and looked and spoke differently than everyone else, Japanese people wouldn't initiate a conversation with me, possibly out of respect. This relates back to communication with strangers. However, if I initiated a conversation with them, they always seemed excited to talk with me. As the outgoing person I am, I initiated many conversations. I realize this goes against typical Japanese customs; however, as a foreigner in a new environment who craved human communication, I couldn't help myself. My conversations with Japanese people were almost always in Japanese, as it was rare that they were comfortable speaking to me in English. Having completed just one year of Japanese classes at EWU, my Japanese was at a basic level. Although the conversations I had with new acquaintances were always fruitful in learning about Japanese culture and practicing my Japanese, they would often end after small-talk. This was another adjustment I had to make. I often felt lonely because I would become so close to connecting with someone and then my language proficiency would fall short. Even though many ALT companies such as Joytalk do not require ALTs to have more than a basic Japanese proficiency, I would highly recommend to other outgoing people

like myself to have at least an intermediate level of Japanese proficiency before living in Japan.

One of the most surprising things I learned about Japanese people at my schools is how hard working they are. My Japanese colleagues were the hardest working people I have ever met. Teachers at my schools often showed up to work at 7:00 am and stayed at school until 7:00 or later. On top of that, schools often had teacher-wide meetings held on Saturdays and sometimes Sundays. These meetings lasted all day as well. I was never required to come on the weekends, and my days started at 7:30 and ended about 4:30. The most miraculous part of watching all of these hard working teachers was they realized they had a duty and did it without complaining or questioning. As an American, this was really interesting to see.

The students at my schools worked hard as well. Some students in each class were designated to help deliver and serve lunch to the rest of the class. After lunch, all students spent 20 minutes fulfilling cleaning duties throughout the school. Students were in charge of sweeping the teachers' room, mopping the classrooms and hallways, wiping the stairs between floors, cleaning their desks, and many others. I never saw a student resisting their duties.

Most people are familiar with the Japanese custom of bowing. And Bruce Feiler, an American teaching in a junior high school in Japan, even wrote a book titled *Learning to Bow*. But this is just one of the many customs I learned while in Japan. When entering the office or personal space of someone, especially of higher rank, it is expected that the person entering will bow and say, "*Shitsureishimasu*," which in English means, "pardon for this rudeness." It is expected that the person who entered bow and say it again as they

are leaving the room. Every time students would enter the teachers' room they would say, "*Shitsureishimasu.*" If they didn't, they were asked to go back to the entrance and say it. For me, the first couple of weeks I entered the teachers' room at my schools I would say it as well, just to avoid coming off as rude. Eventually, the teachers told me I didn't have to say it because I was a teacher. Still, whenever I entered the copy room or the principal's office, I would say it. This expression was also utilized before making an interjection into a conversation or apologizing for a mistake.

When giving anything to someone of higher rank, there is another custom. At the end of each day of teaching, I would approach the principal or vice principal with a sheet that they would stamp, marking that I was present that day. To present them with the sheet, I would put one hand on each side of it, bow, and then move the paper towards him/her with the font upright in a position they could instantly read. A vice principal at one of my schools told me I did not need to bow when handing him my sheet, but I never felt comfortable leaving out the bow entirely, so I just bowed at a smaller angle. The angle at which someone bows in Japan shows the level of politeness or gratitude they wish to express and relative rank. Smaller bows are used when receiving smaller favors, and larger bows are used when receiving larger favors.

While in Japan, I became familiar with the custom of consuming green tea at the beginning of each day. At all of my schools there was a designated person, usually the secretary or the person in charge of food preparation, who would place a cup of green tea on everyone's desk at the beginning of the day. Sometimes, it would also be served again after lunch. I hadn't had much experience drinking tea prior to coming to Japan, but I

learned to enjoy it as it was something that everyone did, which made me feel closer to my colleagues.

The way English education is approached in Japan was very interesting to me. As an elementary teacher, my main goal was to foster an enjoyment of the English language in my students. Because of this, each day usually had a song, game, and activity—whether for 1st grade or for 6th grade. Being asked to teach at three different schools and multiple grade levels, I often wondered if seeing a class once a week could provide a desire in my students to start taking English more seriously. Because English class was likely the only time they heard English during any given week, I was curious if it was enough to make a difference in their motivation and proficiency. When the 6th graders graduated and moved on to middle school, the English lessons would be much more focused on grammar, and I thought students may feel a disconnect between their experience with English in elementary school compared with middle school where they would have English class every day, and the focus would be primarily grammar and translation.

3) How has my current teaching philosophy been influenced by my work in Japan?

It has been two years since I taught in Japan. During those two years, I have taught English 101, 101 Second Language (ESL), and 201 as a graduate instructor and full-time graduate student in English. The differences between teaching Japanese elementary students as opposed to college English 101 and 201 students are great. Teaching English 101 (ESL) has allowed me to utilize some of the same techniques I used in Japan, especially multimodal materials. It is important for teachers who work with multilingual writers to remember to be explicit about how English papers are structured rhetorically. It

is easy to assume students have a basic knowledge of how English papers are structured, but with different cultures having different rhetorical styles of writing, it is not the case. In Japan, however, none of our students wrote essays in English.

My teaching philosophy now, as it was in Japan, is still focused on promoting student enjoyment of the curriculum and working with each other to build a community in the classroom. I currently integrate group work almost daily into my classrooms, even if it is for a brief amount of time. I believe student comfort with the material as well as with each other are important. Furthermore, group work prepares them for classroom discussions, which also play an important role in my classes. In Japan, I didn't conduct classroom discussions because student proficiency levels were too low, but the Japanese students, like most of my American students, thrived when given pair work and activities.

4) How does a novice English teacher navigate the challenges in the classroom in elementary schools in Japan?

A major comfort teaching as an ALTs in Japanese elementary classrooms is that if behavioral issues arise, such as the one mentioned in Chapter 3 when two 4th grade boys turned their backs to me, there is always a co-teacher who speaks Japanese to help remedy the situation. However, I seldom had behavior problems in any of the schools. The most common challenge facing ALTs is keeping students engaged in the lessons. Because the English abilities are low at this stage, it is imperative that teachers create fun and exciting activities for students to participate in, even if they are not comfortable speaking English. My company provided their ALTs with a few games and activities to use when we began teaching, but most activities were created by the ALTs. The internet provides access to many great activity ideas, but the teacher is responsible for adjusting

the lessons to meet their students' levels and needs. Meeting with co-teachers to discuss lessons without inconveniencing them is another challenge ALTs may face, especially if their Japanese level is low. I was fortunate in that the co-teachers in all three schools often gave me free reign to teach anything I wanted, providing me with many opportunities to gain teaching experience and accepting me as a peer.

5) How was I received by colleagues and students, and how did I know I was fitting in?

Entering a school system that was quite different from the ones I was familiar with was daunting at first. I was anxious about accidentally straying from or forgetting important Japanese customs and making myself stand out. Before coming to Japan, I was aware of the proverb, "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down." Blending in was always a priority, so if I did not know what to do, I would look around to see what my colleagues were doing and follow their example.

At the beginning of the year, I was invited to introduce myself to each school, so I wrote a speech in Japanese that I hoped would express how excited I was for the opportunity to work with them—students, teachers, and faculty alike. Soon I discovered that all the teachers at every school were all very kind and accepting of me. I found that the way I could check on how I was doing was by communicating with the English teacher at each school, making sure I was following customs and avoiding coming across as impolite. Close contact with these teachers was paramount for me. In regards to the students, I felt the best way I could fit in was to interact with them as much as I could, both inside and outside of the classroom. I played outdoor games and sports with them; I high-fived them when passing them in the hallway and after almost every class. In my

mind, this was the easiest way to fit in with them. At times, my students were a little shy to talk to me, so I familiarized myself with the basics of popular movies and anime shows that they liked. Because I didn't spend much time conversing with the principal and vice principal at one of my schools, I did experience some anxiety about not knowing what exactly they thought of me. Ultimately, I just did the best I could and hoped that if I did not have their acceptance in the beginning of the year, I would earn it by the end.

6) What were the challenges and benefits of going to different schools on different days?

One of the biggest benefits to teaching at different schools on different days was being able to use the same activities on consecutive days. The 5th and 6th graders, who I worked with the most, were all at similar levels, which made this possible. On the other hand, a major challenge of only seeing a specific class once or sometimes twice a week was that we weren't able to develop as much of a bond as I would have liked. Furthermore, with the students only hearing and speaking English once or twice a week, it was difficult to reinforce important vocabulary and concepts. The curriculum did not move too quickly, but I would like to have spent more time with the students on each section.

7) What worked in my teaching?

The most effective lessons I taught seemed to be multi-staged activities requiring students to complete a goal by completing consecutive steps. Instead of repetition of a phrase, which happened often, these goal-oriented activities required a deeper use of the language. Students asked each other questions looking for a specific answer that only

certain students had, therefore requiring them to ask the questions multiple times to multiple classmates. Once they found the answer to their question they had to come to me or my co-teacher. Then, the co-teacher and I would ask for the answer that they found to make sure it was correct. These activities required students to spend extended periods of time using their English speaking and listening skills. To motivate the students to complete the activity I would often turn it into a competition to see which student could finish first.

Adding competition to games and activities worked very well in motivating students. However, I was always careful to put students in groups for high competition games as I didn't want any students to feel singled out. For a few games, I made the entire class work together to complete a goal in a certain amount of time. I would mark their time and then the other sections of that grade would work as a class to try to finish the goal in a shorter amount of time. This comradery between sections was fun for the students.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Chapter 5 is the conclusion including (1) limitations of the study; (2) suggestions for teaching in elementary schools in Japan; (3) recommendations for future research/implications for teaching; and (4) the value of autoethnography and final reflections on teaching in Japan.

Limitations

A major limitation of the present study is that all accounts of my experience living and teaching in Japan have been written retrospectively. While living in Japan, I didn't journal on daily happenings, so all of the material is based on recollection. Further, this study only presents my experiences and thoughts on my teaching. The reader would benefit greatly from seeing the perspective of my colleagues, superiors, and students. Finally, my experience is only that of a Caucasian American male in his mid-twenties teaching in rural city of about 80,000 people. My time in Japan can serve as a resource and guide for future ALTs, but every ALTs experience is and will always be unique.

Suggestions for Those Preparing to Teach in Japan

Based on my experience alone, I would suggest the following:

1. Try to find a cultural broker, before or upon arrival—a person who can explain the intricacies of interactions and behaviors from a Japanese point of view while being truly interested in the ALT's point of view.
2. Learn as much Japanese as possible, though even the most fluent ALTs are expected to speak English only in the classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

I want to recommend areas of study that could be pursued by future researchers.

1. Double diary study would be most valuable if the cooperating teacher in Japan could write a journal for five minutes a day with the ALT and share their journals, possibly even “assign” one another topics to write on, not necessarily related to the teaching that day. A sample topic might be something like this: “what I noticed today was that _____.”
2. Students might draw and/or write daily to respond to the instruction or activities they did that day to create their own books as keepsakes of their experiences with the ALT, who could then share these in some form of reading or publishing in the school—on bulletin boards, in the library, or online.
3. Reports on focus groups that could be initiated by the ALTs as a way to document their experiences in the classroom and possibly inviting the co-teachers for a meal so that they could all discuss how things are going and make suggestions.
4. Create a website where the ALTs could share materials and approaches which could then be written up as article or a thesis. A blog might also work for this purpose. When other teachers try out the materials and approaches, they could post how it went and how they modified the materials for older or younger children.
5. Conduct research on multimodality and with the research, provide a concept for a quarter/semester long project that may promote these skills as well as

positive and collaborative identities for native and non-native college freshmen students in beginner level English classes.

Implications for teaching

Teachers of the English/Language Arts already have models for this type of collaboration, such as those for producing a play. Any dramatic production includes speech, movement, costumes, props, sets, lighting and, sometimes, music and dance. Beyond the performance itself is the need for producing appealing programs and advertising. And, beyond that are the persuasive verbal skills needed to raise funds to produce the production.

- Other kinds of more traditional multimodal projects also require this type of collaboration. When students produce brochures, literary magazines, books, videos, or greeting cards, collaboration improves the product and helps all students involved learn more.
- The use of multimodal literacies has expanded the ways we acquire information and understand concepts. Ever since the days of illustrated books and maps texts have included visual elements for the purpose of imparting information. The contemporary difference is the ease with which we can combine words, images, sound, color, animation, video, and styles of print in projects so that they are part of our everyday lives and, at least by our youngest generation, often taken for granted.
- As more research on World Englishes is conducted, it is imperative that it be transformed into practice in EFL classrooms. Using videos or artifacts that present

varieties of English is one easy way to begin this process, so that learners become more sensitive to the different kinds of English—the speakers, the ways of speaking, and the particular vernaculars that are appearing throughout the world.

Value of Autoethnography

When immersed in a new culture, living in it day to day, it is difficult to analyze experiences as they happen. I was tired when I got home from school each day. Communicating with co-workers in a foreign language that I wasn't proficient in fatigued me. As a result, I spent a good portion of time at home relaxing and not a lot of time journaling on my cultural findings of the day or week. However, the autoethnography included in this thesis has provided me with a chance to relive some fond memories as well analyze such a special culture. Autoethnography is becoming more popular as a research method. I believe that the real experiences researchers have living in a culture, although they have limitations, provide data that is tangible and exciting. At times I wish I would have taken more notes while living in Japan, but I also think that taking notes on cultural findings while living there may have removed me mentally from simply living as a citizen of Japan instead of a researcher. I wanted my experience of cultural differences to come organically.

Final Reflections

Looking back on my year in Japan, I learned as much about myself as I learned about Japanese people, language, and culture. When I was younger, I never had great ambitions of traveling abroad. I was content living in Washington state, where I was near friends and family. I'm still shocked when I think about how after my undergraduate experience

of getting a minor in TESL and volunteering with AUAP, my aspirations were changed from living in Spokane to living in Japan. It is a unique opportunity that I took and a decision that I am truly proud of. I appreciate all of my co-workers and students for helping me grow as a teacher, and I'm thankful that Joytalk hired me and prepared me to live and teach there. I plan to return to Honjo at some point in the future and reunite with friends. Until then, I will remember my time living abroad fondly, and use my time there to positively impact my life moving forward.

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Education

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA

M.A. in English- Teaching English as a Second Language *2017*

Thesis: An Autoethnography of a Novice ESL Teacher:
Plato's Cave and English Language Teaching in Japan

B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies *2013*

Minors: English, English as Second Language

Teaching Experience

Eastern Washington University

English 101: College Composition: Exposition and Argumentation *2015*

English 201: College Composition: Analysis, Research and Documentation *2016-2017*

English 112: Composition for multilingual students *2017*

- Taught primary and advanced Composition to (diverse student populations)
- Created lesson plans utilizing communicative and direct method activities
- Facilitated critical thinking and academic research inquiries

Joytalk Co.

Chuo E.S, Asahi E.S, Kitaizumi E.S Honjo, Japan

1st-6th grade English class

2014-2015

- Created communicative English lesson plans
- Developed classroom games to promote student engagement of English
- Acted as cultural broker for Japanese Instructors

Professional Development

Eastern Washington University

English 694: Practicum: Teaching First-year Composition

Fall, 2015

English 697: Practicum: Teaching Advanced Composition

Winter, 2016

- Acquired skills to better develop lesson plans and assessment materials
- Developed syllabi to focus student learning towards specific goals

Honors and Awards

Eastern Washington University

Graduate Services Appointments

2015-present

- Competitively awarded G.S.A position serving as instructor of record

Administrative Experience

Asia University America Program, Eastern Washington University
Student Services Assistant

2013-2014

-Developed and facilitated volunteer activities in the community

University Service

Asia University America Program, Eastern Washington University
Classroom volunteer

2011-2013

-Provided one-on-one English conversation practice for
beginner to advanced level Japanese students