

Monographs on Bilingualism No. 9

Educational Options for Multicultural Children Living in Japan

日本に住むバイリンガル子供達と教育

Edited by Amanda Gillis-Furutaka

A collection of articles providing shared experiences and suggestions on educational choices available in Japan. The articles cover pre-school years through to selecting a college, Japanese public school education, international schools, home schooling, alternatives to regular schools and ways to supplement school work.

日本での子どもの教育の選択について、経験を分かち合い助言となる一連の記事を集めました。内容としては、就学前の段階から大学選択までの範囲が言及されており、また日本の公教育、インターナショナルスクール、在宅教育（ホームスクーリング）、通常の教育に対してオルタナティブな教育、家庭での補修的な学習についても記述されています。

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Foreword

Education is a topic of deep concern to parents, especially in the early years when they have to make decisions on behalf of their children. But it is not long before children have their own ideas about what will suit them best. The aim of this monograph is to help parents and children make informed decisions about which kind of education is best for them.

The seeds of the monograph were sown at a JALT Kyoto Chapter meeting called "Educational Options", organized by members of the Bilingualism SIG, in January 1999. A panel of parents of bilingual children explained how and why they made certain decisions about their children's education in both languages. The meeting was so well attended that, Stephen Ryan, who at that time was editor of *Bilingual Japan*, the Bilingualism Special Interest Group's newsletter, recognized the need to provide more information on this topic to the multilingual community living in Japan. He invited me to edit a regular column for *Bilingual Japan* called "Educational Options". The column has covered a number of issues such as the pros and cons of Japanese and international schools, home schooling, short and longer periods of study in the country of the non-Japanese parent, to name a few. I would like to thank all the people who have contributed to this column so far.

With the steadily increasing number of international marriages taking place in Japan and some quite radical changes to the Monbusho curricula on the horizon, the B-SIG agreed that it seemed a worthwhile project to gather these various viewpoints and experiences into one publication. The response to requests for new articles was so positive that the monograph contains many articles which have not already appeared in *Bilingual Japan*. I would like to thank all the authors who have contributed for the first time to a B-SIG publication. In selecting articles, I have tried to cover as wide a range of perspectives as possible and the articles which have been reprinted from *Bilingual Japan* have been chosen because they cover areas not included in the new material.

The first two articles focus on the early years and ways in which parents can broaden educational opportunities for their pre-school and elementary school children. There are several articles which discuss the merits and demerits of both a Japanese and an international school education and the results of switching between the two systems. There is information for parents whose children are not happy within a formal education system, or who are in need of outside school support. For those who are further along the educational road, the last article gives practical advice on how to go about choosing a college in the U.S. I hope that there is something for everyone in this modest collection and would encourage you to continue to read and write for the "Educational Options" column in *Bilingual Japan* now that the educational options in Japan are rapidly expanding.

Amanda Gillis-Furutaka

Working With What You Have Got:
Starting Out on the Bilingual Education Journey
Louise George Kittaka

We are a bicultural family of five – Japanese Dad, New Zealand Mum, and three small children (a son aged 6.6, and two daughters aged 3.10 and 0.7). My husband and I agreed that we want to try and raise our children to be bilingual *and* biliterate if humanly possible, and this article will focus mostly on efforts with our oldest child in this regard. As he is only in first grade, we are still novices and very much feeling our way. The three ‘policies’ governing my thinking at this stage are: 1) accentuate the positive (be proud of what we have achieved, rather than worry too much about what we have not done); 2) be proactive in seeking and trying out resources or ideas that might prove useful; 3) be flexible and continue to reassess our situation as we go.

My son started at the local public Japanese elementary school this year. There is a very popular international school in our city, and sending our child to the international school might seem an obvious choice for a family like ours, but it was never really a serious option for us. The main reason is simply a matter of finances – international schools are very expensive! What we do for one child, we must be prepared to do for the others, and putting all three through the international school is well beyond our means at this stage. Another reason is that we expect to remain in Japan for the foreseeable future, and we believe that sticking with the Japanese education system is probably the best option for a child who is to grow up in Japan. If at some stage we find one of our children is not coping in the Japanese system, then it would probably be possible to switch them over to the international system at a later date, or at least to a school specializing in bilingual education. Finally, we both thought it was best for our son to attend the local elementary school, so he would have friends in the neighbourhood, and no additional pressure from a long commute to school. We expect to be looking more seriously at a wider range of educational options when he gets to Junior High.

I should mention that our two older children were born in the USA while we were there on a transfer, and they only spoke English when they came back to Japan to live (aged 4.4 and 1.8). Although Japanese has always been the main language used between my husband and I, both of us used English almost exclusively with the children. (My husband has always been very busy with work ever since our son was a baby, and his contact with the children is mostly limited to weekends. Early attempts by my husband to use Japanese were soon abandoned when our son answered back in English.) The fact that our son’s English was so strong when we came back to Japan also influenced our decision to send him to a Japanese school. We were reasonably confident that his ‘head start’ in English would enable him to retain his fluency, even as he progressed through the Japanese education system.

Upon our return to Japan from the USA, our son started Japanese kindergarten (*youchien*) halfway through the second year (*nenchou*) class, and within six months his Japanese was good enough for him to function happily in the classroom and to be able to communicate with teacher and friends with no major difficulties. Meanwhile, his younger sister was attending a private nursery school several days a week, and her English and Japanese developed more or less at the same rate.

After we had been back a year or so, I noticed a distinct change in the language dynamics in our house. I continued to speak only in English with the children after our return, while my husband began using an increasing amount of Japanese as their skills in that language developed. Japanese was still used between my husband and I. Up until then, the children had spoken to each other mainly in English, but within the space of a few weeks, they suddenly switched over to using mostly Japanese. This set off some alarm bells at our house, and my husband and I agreed to make an effort to speak only in English to each other at home, at least in front of the children, and my husband also tries to use more English with them. I have also appealed to my son, the most fluent in English, to try and use English around his sisters to 'help them become good at English like you!' It works sometimes. We are not fanatical about insisting they use English, but we are aware that as Japanese becomes more dominant in their lives, the children will naturally favour Japanese at home if they reason that Mum and Dad are using it nearly all the time, too. Precedents set now will be hard to break further down the road. This is why encouraging speaking of English at home, whenever practical, is important now!

When our son started the last year of Japanese kindergarten (*nenchou*), I started thinking seriously about teaching him to read and write in English. He had learned his alphabet over one summer when he was 3. At 5.2, he could write his own name and had mastered some pre-reading skills (e.g. could rhyme words; could identify that 'jump' starts with 'j'; could suggest 'bear' and 'blue' if asked for a word beginning with 'b', etc.) But making the leap over to 'real reading' seemed very difficult for us. Although I do some teaching, my background is in editing and writing, and I didn't have much idea of how to go about teaching a beginner. I tried using a random assortment of beginning readers and phonics workbooks, but things were just not 'clicking'. I know some women in international marriages, whose daughters had learned to read in English while attending Japanese public school, but when I asked how they achieved this, the usual reply was, "Oh, she just seemed to pick it up on her own!" (I was like this, too – a quiet, bookish little girl who picked up reading more or less on her own by the age of 5. However, it did not help a bit when it came to my own little boy!)

Around this time, I took the children home for the summer vacation to New Zealand, where it was winter and school was in session. Our son was 5.4 at the time. New Zealand children start school on a rolling admissions basis as soon as they turn 5, and I arranged for our son to attend the local primary school for five weeks. He was placed in a new entrants class, and joined a group of children working on pre-reading skills. I had high hopes that he would somehow make the leap from pre-reading into 'real reading' during this time, and at first was very disappointed when this did not eventuate. He worked on letters and sound recognition, and practiced writing simple words, and had homework. However, this homework was not the beginner readers I remembered from my childhood, but merely phonics worksheets. At the end of our time there, I visited the teacher for a summing up session. She said he was simply not ready for 'real reading' yet, but that he had made good progress in his letters and phonics work, and that his verbal skills were at age level, which was reassuring! When I think of the fact that he was immersed in a totally English environment, and was learning songs and listening to stories from my culture, I felt a lot more positive.

Shortly after returning to Japan, we had a reading breakthrough. A friend showed us a program

called *Hooked on Phonics (HOP)*, which she had picked up in the US. The *HOP* program consists of five boxes or levels, with drill books, cassettes, flashcards, colorful graded storybooks, and parents' guide. (I think of it as 'teaching reading for dummies' - with the 'dummy' here being me, the parent, not my child!) We borrowed the first box from my friend, and within days my son was actually reading! We quickly ordered our own set, and I have since recommended the program to other friends in international marriages, who are also now using it successfully with their children. The nice thing about *HOP* is that it progresses in a logical sequence, and you can spend as little or as long as you like on each part, pacing the curriculum to fit your child's needs. It has charts and stickers, which is a good incentive for a child like my son, who likes to measure his progress. We have currently finished the first two boxes, and at the end of each box, I made a point of marking the occasion with lots of fanfare and a special treat (a visit to an amusement park, or the purchase of a coveted toy). No one program can meet all your needs, and I supplement here and there with some of the other material I have on hand. However, *HOP* remains the cornerstone of our home reading program, and it has been a godsend for me.

Finding the time to do English reading with my son is always something of a struggle, especially now he is in Japanese first grade and has homework, too. The time that seems to work best for us is before bedtime, and we fit in about 10-15 minutes a day. Longer would be better, but with two younger siblings also clamouring for my attention, it just isn't practical at this stage. I work outside the home, so my son attends an after school program three days a week, and swimming classes on another day, so the days are long and busy. I do have one free afternoon a week, however, and I have arranged for him to come straight home from school on that day, so we can spend some time one-on-one before collecting his younger sisters from public daycare (*hoikuen*). Whenever possible, I try to make time for extra reading practice. Often this involves going out to a café or fast food restaurant, and taking along a book to read. Getting out of the house and having something special for afternoon tea can inspire a rather tired young fellow (who would really rather be watching TV or playing with his pals) to make an extra effort to read in English.

HOP does not include a writing component, and while I am still euphoric about the progress made in reading, I am always looking for more ways to improve on our present situation. One idea was to try and find some kind of weekly group session that my son could join, working with other children of a similar age and level for extra motivation and a break from learning with Mum. I didn't know of anybody with kids the right age and level who lives near enough to make this feasible, so I did the rounds of some of the English schools in the area that offer *kikoku shijou* (returnee) classes. There were no suitable classes, however. Then I found help from an unexpected quarter. A friend mentioned that a young Japanese woman comes to her home to tutor her children in English. This tutor is a licensed teacher, who has taught young children in both the USA and New Zealand. She now comes once a week to our home to work with my son, mainly on writing, and my older daughter sits in, too. Perhaps the situation is a little odd - I know they use a mixture of Japanese and English, but that doesn't bother me particularly! I have found teaching my own child to read and write quite stressful at times, and I am not a very patient teacher, either. Having someone else come to us once a week gives me a respite from teaching my son, and gives him a break from me, too!

This year we went back to New Zealand again for the summer vacation, and my son attended primary school there again for about five weeks. This time he was in a mixed class of first and second graders, consisting of older fives and younger sixes. Some of the children were in his class last year. To our delight, all the work we had put in at home with HOP and the tutor was rewarded when we found that our son fitted right in with one of the reading groups. He brought home a book to read for homework every night. His writing also progressed a lot. For the first time, he got practice in spelling, and his crowning achievement was getting all his spelling words correct in a sponsored spellathon to raise funds for the school. He enjoyed his time at school more this year, as he knew what to expect and had already had some friends there. His last year's teacher actually commented on how much more confident and settled he was this year.

We do realize that the older he gets, the harder it will be to just breeze in and attend school for a few weeks in New Zealand. At some point, efforts to accommodate a student like our son might prove too disrupting and the school might cry, 'enough!' I wonder how far he can go before the gap between our son and his peers widens too much. There are also other things to consider, such as becoming busier at school in Japan, and the fact that my son may begin to resent the trips when he realizes he is missing out on summer vacation here! There is also a strong likelihood that my work situation will change in the future, making it harder to take extended vacations. However, I intend to try and make an annual trip home for as long as possible. (Interestingly, my husband used to intimate that financing an annual trip home for me and the children was too much of a strain, but having seen the educational advantages, he has come round to my way of thinking!)

I feel compelled to comment on the effect on our son's Japanese studies of emphasizing English at home and during the summer vacation. At the time of writing, he has completed one term of elementary school, and so has just finished learning *hiragana*. Unlike most of his peers, he did not know much *hiragana* before starting school. He could write his name, and that was all. The schools in our city teach the children *hiragana* from scratch when they enter first grade, and I didn't see the point of adding *hiragana* on top of English reading. I oversee my son's Japanese homework each weeknight, and deal with correspondence from the school. However, I do not encourage my son to practice his Japanese reading and writing any more than necessary, apart from the occasional card or letter to a friend or his Japanese grandmother. Nor will I read the children any books in Japanese. The time we have together is limited enough as it is, so I only read to them in English – even going so far as to translate a Japanese book if necessary! Their father sometimes reads to them in Japanese on the weekend. Perhaps because he is not getting the Japanese very much at home, our son's Japanese writing skills seem to be lagging behind most of the class. He forgot some of his *hiragana* during the time we were in New Zealand. (Although we took his Japanese summer vacation homework over with us, he didn't even want to look at it. He was wrapped up in English, and the Japanese work became a tiresome extra. In other words, a reverse of the situation was often have at home in Japan, when it is the English that I have to cajole him into doing!) At some point we might be looking at extra classes or drills in Japanese to help him keep abreast of the class. This is one of the problems with trying to raise a biliterate child, and I expect it will continue to be an issue for concern. I must say, so far his Japanese teacher has been very supportive of

our biliterate ideas.

Although we try to talk English in the home, my children need to see and hear others talking in English outside the home, particularly other children. With this in mind, soon after we relocated to Japan, I started an English playgroup – a weekly gathering of mothers and preschool children. I had enjoyed such groups in the USA, and decided that I wanted something similar here in Japan, and that it might as well be in English! We live in a small city in Western Tokyo, and not in the heart of the international community, so the playgroup is open to anyone interested, regardless of nationality. The only prerequisite is that the mothers are fluent enough to communicate in everyday English – it is not intended to be free *eikaiwa* lessons. We have a mixture of foreign and Japanese members, some in international marriages, some not. Among the Japanese members, some have spent time overseas, while others have used English a lot in their careers. We meet weekly in a community center, and sing and play games, and have story time or crafts. We also have occasional family events, such as picnics and parties for Halloween, Easter, etc., so that fathers and older siblings can join in, too. My older daughter has benefited the most from this group, and it is the highlight of her week. Apart from the chance to interact in English once a week, the main advantage for me is that I have been able to build a circle of like-minded friends in the area. This group is a great resource for sharing information and ideas on bilingual/bicultural child raising. As a parent who is doing things a bit differently from normal in Japan, I feel very strongly about the importance of having a support network in the community. Of course, it is possible to seek support through the Internet, over the phone, or through journals and newsletters, etc. But nothing beats being able to get together with like-minded parents on a regular basis.

Another group we are finding useful is the Tokyo-based children's library Biblioteka, which aims to provide playtime and reading fun in English for families. Many of the participants are bicultural families like us, and the focus is mainly on kindergarten and elementary aged children. The group meets regularly for themed events organized by the parents, and they also offer a lending library of English books. One of the nicest things about our involvement with Biblioteka is the chance for my son to meet other boys his age who can speak English – in our area, it seems most of the children who speak English are little girls!

As mentioned earlier in this article, we live quite near to an international school. They have a Boy Scout troupe that meets at the school, and the activities are all in English. The group is open to boys outside the school as long as they can communicate in English, and I plan to enroll my son. Other friends with slightly older children, also attending Japanese schools, have found the Boy Scouts and Brownie programs at the international school is a big boost for their kids' English skills, as well as providing enjoyable activities for parents and children alike.

From her survey in the B-SIG monograph, *Adding Biliteracy to Bilingualism: Teaching Your Child to Read English in Japan*, Mary Goebel Noguchi found that younger siblings in a family were more likely to attain a high level of fluency and literacy in English if the older child in the family was already fluent and literate. With two younger sisters coming up behind, this makes me all the more determined to succeed with our son. In some ways, it will only get harder from here, as our older daughter does not speak English as well as her brother did at the same age, and the baby was born here in Japan. Both girls

attend day care four days a week, so are with me less than their brother was at the same age. However, I do not think it will help to worry too much about the future at this point. Learning is a life long process, and we will continue to make use of the time and resources available, and in doing so I trust we will somehow hit upon the right mix for our family's situation.

Resources mentioned:

Chofu English Playgroup (CEP) Contact: Louise George Kittaka <lgkittaka@aol.com>

Biblioteka Contact: Lyn Sato <yoyogi@gol.com>

Hooked on Phonics (HOP) Contact: www.hop.com

Do It Yourself Bilingual Education

Elizabeth Chikamatsu

Ten years ago, when we told my mother-in-law that we were expecting a baby, she told me to work on my Japanese because the child would eventually be ashamed of me. The thought of my having a relationship with my child in a foreign language was not possible as far as I could see. I had not been in country long enough to solidify my Japanese language skills and I knew a child would soon surpass my level. Besides, I wanted our children to be as bilingual and bicultural as possible to know all family members well. My parents-in-law were very skeptical of raising children bilingually. They were afraid they would be confused.

Those were pre-Internet days, so I did not have much information available to me. I found some books through Multilingual Matters that presented the one-parent one-language approach. That seemed like a viable option. My in-laws lived downstairs so they, as well as my then not-as-busy husband and, of course, the community at large would provide input in the dominant language, Japanese. Besides having our mama-child relationship in English, it became my mission to provide other English environments for Emma, now 9;6, and Simon, 5;6. We've been juggling these two worlds of language ever since.

Home, preparing for anything

My husband, who works for an American university program that prepares Japanese students for undergraduate programs in the United States, declared from the very beginning that it was his wish that our children, after going through the Japanese school system, go to a university in the States. I, being an American ESL instructor with many years of experience preparing international students for academia, wanted to prepare our children for the choice of going to either a Japanese or American university. I saw firsthand that it was possible for adults to achieve a level of English for academic studies, but I knew how hard and frustrating it was for most. Differences in rhetorical and thought patterns, culture, and academic expectations in addition to the required high level of fluency made it an almost insurmountable endeavor for some. For insurance sake, too, I wanted to prepare our children academically to make the transition into an American school system easily if the need ever arose. American culture and biliteracy as well as being conversant with mom were important to us.

When my daughter, Emma, was one year old, we were lucky to meet two little girls about the same age who were also from bicultural marriages. We met often and celebrated holidays together keeping up the traditions of America as well as those of Japan. "Barney" was her English pre-school. She learned a lot from him; language centered on a theme as well as manners and songs. Simon was born when Emma was four, and though she initially spoke to him in Japanese, their relationship remained English until he started nursery school at age four. I started teaching returnee children in our home once a week and Emma helped. The students were very interested in role-play and she always got a part as well. Later when Simon was two, I started an English class for toddlers and their moms. He had a small group to learn songs and to play along with in his mother tongue.

Alone with me or with students, our home was an English environment for both children. We also made trips to the States in the summer and made full use of the opportunities of being with family and meeting friends, watching television, and going to the library, bookstores and community activities.

We continued having English play dates with the two girls, but the other mothers and I felt we were reaching a point of doing something more structured with them. When my daughter was five, I decided to form a group, the Learning Circle, to do 45-minute sessions of language and pre-reading activities. I rented a room at the Chofu library for two time slots, one for the four and five-year-old children and one for the baby group (my son included.) I prepared "lessons" centered around a book or a theme for the older group. Other mothers were to come up with "lessons" on a rotating basis. I hauled toys in my grocery cart for the younger group which turned out to be a mother-baby group.

Emma's English skills strengthened, but not at the expense of her Japanese. In fact, Japanese was and is her stronger language. Papa was home on weekends back then and supplied a lot of the Japanese input. During the week, I took her to the library for story time in Japanese and she would check out books for him to read to her. Her grandmother didn't read to her but prepared her for Japanese nursery school by a lot of "hands on" play, and by teaching her to read hiragana and katakana first through playing with blocks. She was very interested in this and since I was doing pre-reading exercises with her upstairs, I didn't object. Once she learned the syllabary, she was able to read on her own and expand her vocabulary. Grandfather bought her a whole set of traditional children's Japanese songs to sing along with her. She also attended a music class that was really play through music and crafts. These things, along with playing in the park with children (for socialization as well) and watching NHK's children's programs, helped prepare her for Japanese nursery school.

Church, understanding two communities

She attended a Japanese Catholic nursery school from the age of four and was very interested in prayer. She was praying to great grandpa at the altar downstairs and to God at nursery school. Because she was interested and was asking many questions, I started taking her to the West Tokyo Union Church located at the Lutheran seminary on the campus of the International Christian University in Mitaka. There were services in English, an English Sunday school class with girls her own age, and a playroom with an English-speaking attendant for babies and toddlers. Both children have participated in Easter egg hunts and Christmas pageants. It has been a great cultural and linguistic experience for them both. For my daughter, it has strengthened her interest in spirituality in both cultural settings.

The Learning Circle, doing our own thing

Due to busy schedules and attrition, the Learning Circle evolved from a weekly "lesson" in Chofu into English events at my husband's office at Nevada-California International Consortium of Universities and Colleges (NIC). We hosted a production of "The Three Little Pigs" performed by Theater For Children, a theater group that stages children's English productions at the American Club in the Fall. We also held an International Literacy Day in 1999. Returnees as well as bicultural children attended. A storybook was read in Chinese, Japanese, and English. There were other activities and prizes bought through The Children's Book Council. NIC donated the use of their room and the certificates and to make it look official my husband was there in a suit handing them out.

I had hoped to make it an annual event and to form a reading group of the same aged children for my daughter. Because it is very difficult to find children of the same language proficiency and readiness for reading, I ended up teaching my daughter how to read English on our own. She was already an avid reader of Japanese before nursery school, and after years of being read to in English (and watching the pages) and with little instruction in decoding she learned how to read. I finally bought "Hooked on Phonics", a systematic, but rote, American phonics program that parent and child can use fifteen minutes a day. It has helped fill in the gaps in her instruction and has provided the incentive and confidence to read books on her own. It was written for students in American public school who are having trouble with learning to decode. What sold me on the program was that it was book based. The books were carefully written with controlled vocabulary by some well-known authors like David McPhail. It sounds a bit contrived, but they are interesting stories. A sticker is awarded for finishing a book. My daughter was attracted to that and started reading English books on her own.

The Reading Circle, expanding our library

To provide more reading material, I asked other mothers that I knew to pool money for a postal library or reading circle. I initially handed out descriptions of books that I had seen and wanted from catalogs and asked for other recommendations. We came up with a list of 35 books and I ordered them through a local internet bookseller www.skysoft.co.jp We had seven members in the first round so five books were placed in numbered and labeled envelopes to be passed down the list of members. All members started with an envelop and after a month's time they were to pass or send it by book rate on to the next person on the list. After seven months, the round ended and we held a meeting at the Chofu library to choose the books we wanted to keep. We also had story time and some book related activities for the children. It turned out well, but since some of our members in subsequent rounds are outside Tokyo we have decided to just keep the last envelop we receive. We are now in our third round. It has been a good way to expand our library and to preview books. If we had had a Japanese mother in the group in the beginning stages of the Learning Circle, we could have formed our own chapter of Children's International Bunko, a large organization that conducts activities and collects books for its members to borrow. There are chapters in Japan in other languages besides English. The benefit of starting a Bunko chapter is that there is an infrastructure in place. All chapters are connected by a newsletter and they all participate in a seasonal production downtown. Unfortunately, the nearest chapter is inaccessible from our home.

Girl Scouts, expanding our community

Emma is fortunate in that she has many Japanese friends her own age in the neighborhood. But because there were no other bilingual or monolingual girls in English her age in our area, I asked the head leader of Girl Scouts at the American School in Japan if she could start Brownies in the first grade. We had to go there by taxi and come back by train, but it was well worth the trip. She had three fun years with American girls her own age earning patches for her Girl Scout vest. Each patch or Try-it was presented after several activities based on a topic of study or exploration such as "outdoor fun" or "our body" were completed. This broadened her vocabulary as well as her outlook on the world and both cultures. Scouting is an international program conducted in many languages and countries. Lone troops or overseas troops outside the mother country can be established. Details can be obtained from the country's head office. It may mean having two mothers/fathers willing to be leaders in order to form a troop. I was co-leader this last year and found it very rewarding and not very time-consuming. Guidebooks full of activities for each patch made it easy to plan the bi-monthly meetings. We both enjoyed our Thursday afternoons at the American School. It was a great cultural experience. We were, however, outsiders because she didn't attend the school. We were invited every year to attend and were welcomed by all, but she just didn't have the shared experience of going to school with the girls so forming friendships took longer. The Japanese school schedule conflicted with some of the Girl Scout activities that were planned for the American school holidays. In fact, she had to quit scouting altogether because her fourth grade club had meetings on Girl Scout days. Organizing a troop of bilingual and bicultural children with similar backgrounds and school schedules could have its benefits.

Afterschooling in English and Japanese

By being at the American School on Thursdays I was able to see what students were doing in class and what books they were reading and at what level. I was surprised to find that at one point she was reading a book that had been used just a few months earlier with students her own age. Yet, I haven't been too concerned about her reading being on grade level. She does read and write English, but we concentrate more on aural and oral skills by discussing the subjects she is studying at school. I continue to read storybooks to her (she likes to read about girls her own age like Ramona, and Pippi) as well as nonfiction that corresponds to the Japanese curriculum. I have also used the books *What a First (Second, Third) Grader Should Know* as a reference for subjects to talk about. The *Magic Schoolbus* book and video series is very interesting and helpful. *Schoolhouse Rock* is too. She is interested in geography, food and cooking so we cook together and learn about different places. Thinking and questioning skills and synthesizing what she has learned in both languages are academic skills that we try not to neglect.

She will continue to read English, I'm sure. My hope is that she can continue to expand her vocabulary and knowledge of subjects in English orally and aurally so that someday if she enters an English academic program, she can quickly increase her reading level. Besides, it has been posited in past bilingual studies that academic study should continue in a child's first language in order to succeed in the second.

By her own choice, she's enrolled in the *Challenge* series in Japanese to supplement her school studies. That, piano lessons, and school club are the only activities besides play dates that she's involved

in after school. I recently started teaching English to three friends her age. She helps me with modeling dialogs and for that I actually pay her a small sum. She joins in the writing section but isn't interested in practicing printing when she can already write cursive. She needs the practice, though, because her handwriting is not neat. It's been good for her to be with others who are paying to learn. She's just agreed to start her own writing class (with me) on Wednesdays. She loves to write stories in Japanese, maybe she'll translate them or write others in English. She has recently decided she wants to go to a private junior high school. She is definitely not interested in going to an international school.

Little brother, catching up in Japanese

I'm very proud of Emma's efforts and her accomplishments. She has learned both languages simultaneously and has done very well. She can move from one to the other quite easily and can simultaneously translate one from the other. We have done a good job building an English environment, actually so much so that Simon started with English first and has real deficits in Japanese! It wasn't intentional. I wasn't carrying out an experiment. My husband has gotten busier over the years, grandparents have become less worried and more tired, there were no children my son's age in the neighborhood park, I was physically unable to get him to a music class like his sister had attended, and he just preferred being upstairs rather than downstairs. He was involved in all of the other things I have mentioned and then an English playgroup on his own the year before he started nursery school. His sister spoke English with him but read to him in Japanese and English. We also went to Japanese story time at the library. I know that researchers have been saying for the last few years to start with one language at a time in order to build a schema on which to put the new language, but my son unlike my daughter had a hard time starting nursery school! His sister has started speaking Japanese with him and he started the Japanese *Challenge* series for pre-schoolers by Benesse. He has more Japanese friends now and he is progressing every day. We have stepped up our efforts of preparing him for Japanese public school, though, there is a possibility he will go to the American school. We're preparing him, too, for anything.

It has taken a lot of time, energy, and effort to juggle these two worlds of language, but it has been very rewarding for me. I've been able to use what I've learned over the years as a language and reading teacher and I've been able to continue my education as well. I've had to do a lot on my own. I have to say that out of all of this, the mama-child relationship in English has been the most effective tool.

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International Children's Bunko Association T. 0424-71-0022

Hooked on Phonics T. 1-800-1234567 www.hop.com

Girl Scouts in Japan West Pacific Girl Scout Council T. 0425-52-2511 ext.5880

Girl Scouts of the USA www.girlscouts.org/girls

The American School in Japan Admissions office T. 0422-34-5300 www.asij.ac.jp

Switching from Japanese Public Elementary School to Kyoto International School

James Woodham and Hiroe Woodham

Our son Dylan attended local state schools until he was 10 years old. We were very favourably impressed with both nursery and primary schools and he did well at both. However, we felt that it was time for him to move into an English speaking environment, at least in the classroom, as he was speaking only Japanese, although he could understand English. This was probably due to the fact that we did not insist on English being spoken at home from the time of his birth. My wife, who is Japanese, naturally wanted to speak to him in Japanese, all of our neighbours were Japanese, and I was so immersed in Japanese myself at that time that I found it impossible to speak only English. So Dylan never really needed to speak English.

The decision to move him to the International School in Kyoto did not come easily, not least because of the logistics involved. We live in Omimaiko in Shiga, which is a 30 minute train ride from Kyoto station. He then has to catch a bus to the school, adding another 30 minutes to his journey, whereas the local primary school is only a ten minute walk from our house. Fortunately, he was quite willing to undertake the necessary trek to school and even excited at the prospect of travelling alone with his own bus and train passes. The school that I teach at is also near Kyoto station, so I am able to go with him as far as Kyoto.

Entering International School in September of last year, Dylan adapted quickly to his new and very different learning environment and our talks with his teachers gave us confidence that he was again receiving quality education. He was certainly getting more personal attention, as there were only twelve other children in his class. Our concern that he might be falling behind in his Japanese studies was alleviated somewhat by the very flexible attitude of the local primary school whose headmistress was willing to let him continue to attend classes on his holidays from International School. This meant that he was able to attend his old school for about a month before the summer holiday.

So while we are not entirely convinced that Dylan is being pushed as hard academically as he would have been at the local school, he is certainly enjoying his new school and has friends from a wider range of backgrounds than he would otherwise have. When I asked him recently which school he would rather attend, he said that either was OK, but he would prefer to continue at International School because then he could have two sets of friends. We feel that it was good for him to have experienced two different kinds of educational environment at an early age and it is satisfying for me to hear him repeat funny comments that his friends have made at school in natural English. He was also able to speak a lot more English to his cousin in England this summer. I imagine it will take him a few more years to attain real fluency in spoken English and we are still not sure whether he will return to the state system after that or continue at International School aiming at the International Baccalaureate or even go to school in England.

But for now he is enjoying a very full life, playing in-line hockey with his local friends, soccer for his school in Kyoto and doing his best to learn how to write English as well as to memorize kanji.

イギリス人の父親と母親の日本人の私との間に息子 Dylan と娘 Selina がいます。Dylan は去年の 10 才の秋まで私達が今住んでいる滋賀県志賀町立の幼稚園、小学校へ通っていました。それまでは、英語を聞いて理解する事はできましたが、自分から話すことは、決してありませんでした。

去年の夏、Dylan の従兄弟がイギリスから日本に遊びにきた時でした。自分の言いたいことが言えずがっかりしている様子などもみえ、英語を話す環境にしばらくおいてみようかと決心したのでした。

運良く、1 時間以内で通えるインターナショナルスクールがあり、通いはじめて 1 年目の秋を迎えようとしています。まず、気がつく事は、スポーツ、ゲームなどをする事で自然に英語を身につけている事でした。一年前の夏には、従兄弟の前であまり話せなかった Dylan が今年の夏、イギリスで会った従兄弟に、サッカー、テニス、TV ゲームを自分からしようと誘いかける姿をみて、主人と私は、とても満足な気持ちでした。

現在、まだ、3 才下の妹 Selina は地元の小学校 2 年生ですが、兄の学校に大変興味を示しており、自分も兄と同じように 10 才からインターナショナルスクールへ、できればもっと早く行きたいと書いております。

Kyoto International School

Dana Del Raye

(From BJ Vol.10, No.1 January/February 2001)

Elementary education is one of those charged topics that I generally try to avoid talking about these days. Everyone has been to school, had the experience, and knows precisely the way it should be done. When you think about it, they are absolutely right. There are so many variables involved that only parents can make the correct decision as to how to educate their children. I don't intend to change any minds here.

What I can do is describe one unique international school and the experience my son has had there. Another case study? Well, yes and no. I will try to talk about the experience my son has had at Kyoto International School, but I will also try to put it in the context of the concerns parents have when they are considering international school.

What makes Kyoto International School (KIS) unique is that it is funded and run solely by the parents of the children who attend. There are no large multinational companies in Kyoto to prop it up. The students are generally long-term residents. About a third have dual nationalities, a third are foreign residents, and a third have Japanese citizenship. Many of their parents are educators, generally at the university level. Parent involvement is close to 100%, which creates a family-like atmosphere. The maximum allowed student-teacher ratio is 15 to 1. Most classes have a ratio of around 10 to 1.

My Japanese wife and I decided to send my son to KIS because he stopped speaking English in his last year of kindergarten. I had spent 4 years studying Japanese language and literature at the

undergraduate level in the US before I came to Japan, so by the time my son was born, I was fairly fluent. I spoke English to him, and my wife spoke Japanese. However, as his communicative ability in Japanese overtook his ability in English, he began to speak to me in Japanese more often. My wife and I could see that it was no good trying to force him to do otherwise, so we decided on KIS.

The first two days of school there seemed no different than any other at the Japanese kindergarten he had gone to previously. He left and came back cheerfully. When I woke him up on the third morning, however, he sat up and said, "Dad, don't send me back to that other school." I told him not to worry. I said that I wouldn't send him back and asked him what was wrong with the other school. He stared at me for a few moments and said, "Nothing." I didn't press him about it, and he didn't say anything until the last day of first grade, almost a year later. By then he had enough language to describe his experience. He told us that the other children teased him constantly and wouldn't play with him. I did remember that he played by himself in the playground quite a lot. He also said the teachers treated him differently. He said that he liked KIS much better. We had no idea that he was having any trouble at kindergarten.

The discussion that day put aside any other concerns we had about sending him to KIS. What were we concerned about? What many parents in our position are concerned about. Can we afford it? Will he get a good education? Will he learn English? Will he learn Japanese? Will he have friends in the neighborhood? Will he become estranged from Japan? The financial burden seems to be one of the major hurdles for parents in the Kyoto area. Most of us are paying tuition from our own pockets. Some people I have met really can't afford to pay. The school offers some tuition assistance to those who really need it. At the risk of sounding cynical, I also have seen many who complain about the tuition but have no trouble buying the latest in computer equipment or taking trips abroad. Sometimes it is a matter of priorities. The tuition at KIS is about half of the tuition of the large international schools in Tokyo, or equal to private school tuition in the U.S.

As for education, all of the children who started with my son in the first grade are now well above their grade level in English and mathematics. It has become commonplace to see children of visiting professors come for a year at KIS and return to their schools in the U.S. with strong achievement in these two areas (testing at the top of their class or advancing a grade).

My son hasn't had the same success in Japanese, however. Perfect bilingualism, if such a thing exists, takes a lot of time and effort. The school offers a dual language program, but it's really up to the parents as to how important Japanese is. Since KIS currently has no high school, some of the Japanese nationals return to the Japanese system for junior high school. They generally attend "juku" to maintain their Japanese level and do not seem to have much difficulty with the transition in terms of academics. My son still talks to my wife in Japanese and has no trouble communicating in Japanese. His reading ability is fairly high, but the *kanji* are the major stumbling block.

Kyoto International School has recently begun a new program called the Pegasus Project, which is an experientially enriched curriculum for middle school students. Those students scheduled to participate in the project were invited to join the planning committee meetings on a number of occasions. At one meeting involving the role of Japanese language teaching in the curriculum, they unanimously

voiced the desire to be able to read at their grade level in Japanese. They said were frustrated at being limited to reading books whose themes were 3 or 4 years below their maturity level. Their reaction surprised parents, faculty and administrators. Solutions were discussed and prepared, but the most important result of this meeting seemed to be raising awareness of the issue among the students themselves. My wife and I saw Gen begin to take responsibility for learning *kanji* directly afterwards. Over the months that have followed that meeting, his attitude has changed radically. He now badgers us to teach and test him and has set up his own schedule to bring himself up to grade level reading in Japanese. Motivation is no longer a problem.

Valuing Japanese culture is one thing, but integrating into the society is another. I can't say my son has any Japanese friends in our neighborhood. When he was going to Japanese kindergarten, he had a lot of interaction with the children living around us. After he started KIS, however, those friendships gradually dissolved. Our lease ran out, and we had to move out of that neighborhood after he started second grade. He never developed any ties to the new neighborhood, and neither did we. My wife is not from Kyoto, so we didn't have the advantage of relatives living close by. The KIS family naturally became our social network.

Does that mean he has become estranged from his Japanese side? I can think of many anecdotes to prove that he is not. What he said when he came back from a two-week trip to the U.S. last summer, however, answers this question very well. "In Japan, they call me an American. In America, they call me Japanese." He shook his head with a look that clearly said, "They really don't understand, do they?"

Juke-the-Puke

Penny Sugihara (From *BJ* Vol.10, No. 2 March/April 2001)

Perhaps the use of rhyming slang is a linguistic throwback to my plates-of-meat/horse-and-cart Cockney heritage. Or perhaps I should reconsider the annual trips to England to consort with cousins and extend our vocabulary? Or is it just that in our family items held dear are usually referred to irreverently?

Juku (cram school) used to rank a rung higher than *natto* omelette in my pantheon of Japanese non-starters." *Juku?* My kids? NEVER!" I proclaimed adamantly for more years than I care to remember. "We PLAY!" But gradually, like lambs to the slaughter, our playmates disappeared from 3rd grade onwards. At the end of 4th grade I overheard a neighbour calling my daughter Iona "*kawaisou*" because she still had not been enrolled. When I tackled the neighbour about her remark, she said it was OK for me because I could always 'go home' if I did not like the education ahead. However, for her daughter Kana, no *juku* meant no choice.

Iona had been regaling me for some time about the educational hoops Kana was being put through. As I attempted to insist on bedtime by 9.30 p.m., she informed me that Kana never went to bed before 1 a.m. because of her *juku* homework. And she went to *juku* 3 weekday nights, for 3 hours each time, with *bento* and snacks because the bus took an hour each way. And Kana went to *juku* on Saturdays and Sundays and holidays even. Enjoying the fact that I was agog with horror, she continued with relish. The *manga* Iona

had in her school bag were for Kana to read at lunchtime because she was not allowed any distractions at home. And for Kana's next birthday we could only give her a Dr. Grip pop-a-point or something connected to study, otherwise her mother would make her give it back.

Well, I was aghast. Was Kana a willing party in all this? If not, how did her mother gain her cooperation? I was lucky if I could get Iona to pick her discarded clothes off the bathroom floor and her abandoned school bag out of the *genkan*.

However, in 5th grade my pro-play plan took a few knocks. Japanese Dad, our sometime homework prop, was assigned to Tokyo for a year at least. The *kanji* Iona was studying turned abstract overnight and maths homework suddenly brought tears to her eyes. I attempted to help with the latter, but confused her further with my English ways of working. I spoke to her teacher who assured me that he saw no real problem if she just persevered.

I decided our problems were real and that further action was necessary. In addition, we had begun to look ahead and the only secondary school Iona felt would suit her had a stiff entry exam. She was unlikely to pass without more in-depth study. However, there were a few logistical problems to surmount. I had been rendered an involuntary single parent; we live up a mountain; we have 2 children with different extra-curricular activities; I work and we were already trying to fit in English with Mum every day. Help would have to be out-sourced and very local. With misgivings, I made an appointment at the only option our *danchi* of 3000 residents offered, Gress Juku, assuming that the 'pro' was inside.

Within a month we were converts. Tamada-*sensei* had listened receptively and sympathetically as I aired my list of concerns and hopes in hideous Japanese. He had looked me in the eye, had not sweated, wrung his hands or once sucked air through his teeth. I had found I was enjoying talking to him. The classroom was relaxed and friendly, full of works of art, plants and objects indicating he had travelled widely. I believed Iona would like him, and I decided we would give it a try for 1.5 hours of maths and 1.5 hours of Japanese language study a week. With a view to the stiff exam ahead, I agreed that she would sit *mogi* tests at *juku* (national tests which establish academic performance), as they came around, so that we could ascertain what her chances of success might be. There would be 6 children in the *juku* class in all and they would break for a cup of tea half way through each session.

Everything went well. Iona enjoyed *juku*. Her confidence, speed and school grades all improved rapidly. She continued to find maths challenging, but if she could not do her homework she went early to the next session and was helped with it. If we had queries he always found time to meet us. The *mogi* test result sheets pinpointed her weaknesses and he helped her focus on them. He had a point system for achievement and at any time accumulated points could be spent on stationery supplies he made available - fruit scented pens and notebooks etc. She or I quite often baked biscuits or cakes that were taken for tea time.

From 6th grade we added a third 1.5 hour session per week for exam preparation. She also went to a summer session (2 weeks, Monday to Friday, 9.30 - 11 a.m.), but we turned down the New Year session because we felt she needed a complete break. The Sunday before the entry exams started in January, he held an open morning for anybody who wanted to turn up. He would work on whatever anybody chose. Iona went, as did 3 others, and I believe they just chatted. Iona passed into the school of her choice and

Tamada-sensei was the first person she informed. She continued *juku* till the end of January, then announced she was stopping, but probably only until April.

Our son Sho is taking the same route. We enrolled him from 5th grade. His feelings about *juku* and Tamada-sensei are also very positive. I asked both children to tell me exactly why they liked *juku* and their answers are:

-we get lots of attention

-it's interesting

-it's fun

-Sensei is kind

-Sensei can keep control of the boys

-there's nobody stopping you studying by messing around and distracting you

-we can ask questions easily

-Tamada-sensei explains until you understand and doesn't just leave you behind if you're too slow

-Tamada-sensei is interested in us and tries to help us in our lives not just with our work

-the *mogi* tests help us try harder and he doesn't tell anybody else what our results are.

Coincidentally, as this divulging of information was coming to a halt, Sho suddenly looked at the clock, dived for his bicycle and took off with a parting "Oops! Can't be late for juke-the-puke!"

I wondered if we had just been very lucky with Gress Juku and Tamada-sensei. For this article I inquired around and I am very grateful to Etsuko Wachs for her help with the following information. Please note that this information is very general.

Among many others, Mabuchi Kyoshitsu, Seiki and Kyoshin are examples of Kansai-based '*shingaku juku*', i.e. serious cram schools. Classes are offered in maths, Japanese language, social studies and science. There is an entry test. Classes are streamed and children are bumped up and down between the streams according to weekly test results. Streams may be ranked *Dai-ichi Kibou Class* (First Choice Hope Class, referring to the child's first choice school), *Dai-ni Kibou Class* etc., ostensibly to keep the children motivated. Classes may run between 5 -10 p.m. on weekday evenings. Classes may run from 10 a.m.- 9 p.m. on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. Going to *shingaku juku* 6 days a week is common. Special courses are offered in spring, summer and winter vacations. These are usually daily and may be for up to 12 hours, though free study periods are scheduled within this time. Two *bento* are necessary. Parents feel pressurised to enroll their children by 4th grade at the latest. There may be 20 to 30 students per class and no individual attention is given. If a child cannot keep up he/she is moved down. The teachers too are continually evaluated. Failure to achieve results means dismissal. The cramming in of endless facts is a large part of *shingaku juku* studying. Extensive homework is set.

Seiki, however, also offers what it calls 'goal free *juku*'. With this option, the choice is yours. During an initial interview with Seiki, you establish your child's study programme, at the pace you require. Classes are offered in maths, Japanese language, social studies and science, in 90 minute blocks, for 6 hours each day. You choose when, what and for how long, and you are even able to specify the age and sex of the desired teacher. The teacher may move between your child and one other, teaching independent programmes simultaneously. However, there will never be more than 2 students in any study period.

Then there are all the small *juku*, like Gress. If you think *juku* might solve problems for you, establish your goals and shop around. You may well find what you need on your doorstep as we did.

It is also possible to supplement your child's study at home with '*katei kyoushi*'. These are home tutors who can be organised independently or through an agency. If your child is already in *juku*, you can ask the teacher to be a private tutor as well. Or you can approach a college student directly. It may be necessary to feed and transport home tutors.

Alternatively, many study support books are available at book stores, since it is a well known fact that wider and deeper study of elementary school textbooks is necessary for children to pass the entry exams to good secondary schools. A very clever child may be able to negotiate these alone. The average child will not be able to do so without considerable support.

There are a couple of other points I would like to make. If your children are at public (*kouritsu*) school, you will be receiving reports at the end of the semester. Comments and grades may be satisfactory, as our children's were. One-to-one consultations with the class teacher (*kobetsu kondankai*) each semester may unearth nothing out of the ordinary. It was not until we enrolled Iona and Sho in *juku* that we got a serious professional assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. Both the *juku* teacher's personal appraisals and the *mogi* tests were valuable diagnostic tools.

Perhaps you have put your child in a private (*shiritsu*) school to guarantee a better standard of education. Beware. These can be very pressurised environments. You may find that by 3rd grade, most classmates are already in *juku* in addition, headed towards prestigious secondary schools. You may be pressured to enroll your child too so that he/she does not 'hold the class back'.

Finally I would like to say that, at some point, both Iona and Sho asked if they could give up elementary school altogether and just go to *juku*. I have heard that if you do this you cannot get the all important elementary school graduation certificate, which might blight future academic or career prospects. This is a matter for further investigation.

Japanese and Australian Elementary Schools and Senri International School:

A Junior High School Boy's Point of View

Amanda Lee Taura

(Adapted from an article which appeared in *BJ* Vol.9, No. 4 July/August 2000)

This article is based on discussions with my 12-year-old Australian /Japanese son Kye Taura, who was born in Japan, has grown up in Kyoto, spent one year in Australia as a Grade 3 student and is now at Senri International School.

Kye: I went to Daigo Elementary School in Nagaokakyo-city for 5 years for Grades 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6. Grade 3, I spent in Sydney, Australia, going to a local school there. As the school year begins in Australia at the end of January, I didn't quite finish Japanese 2nd grade and came back over 1 year later to start school in Japan in April for Grade 4. My school in Japan, is about 20 minutes walk away from my house. It is surrounded by bamboo trees and has the reputation of being the best level elementary school in

Nagaokakyo city.

I wasn't the only person in my school with a mother or father from another country. There was a kid whose father was Taiwanese and another whose parents were Korean. However, I guess I stood out a little more than they did with my brown hair. This is how I felt about my school.

Bullying: There was no bullying in my elementary school towards me – only name calling. I was called “half” and “*gaijin*”. The older kids (up to 4th grade) in after-school care called me names, but after 2nd grade it stopped. I came back stronger after my year in Australia and was good at sports so no one called me names then because I was stronger than they were and could do a back flip so they were impressed.

Class number: From 1st grade to 6th, the number in my class varied from 36 to 42 students.

Change of classes and teachers: My teachers and the students in my class changed after 1st grade, 2nd grade, 4th grade and then for Grades 5 and 6, I stayed with the same classmates and teacher. These last 2 grades were the best because I had more time to become good friends with everyone and I had a man for my teacher for the first time after always having women teachers.

Clubs: I could participate in club activities from 4th grade. I ended up doing soccer, table tennis and the brass band. I really enjoyed the brass band and learnt how to play the drums and trumpet. My teacher in 5th/6th grade was in charge of the band club and taught us how to march and play. I played at about 3 or 4 concerts as the opening act. There were more boys than girls in this club but I didn't care as it was fun.

Feeling a part of the school: I felt just like the other Japanese kids going there, but sometimes a little different. I blended in though. By the time I got to Grade 4, I didn't care if anyone knew about me being both Australian and Japanese. When they asked me, “Speak a little English to me, will you?” I'd say “No.” I would only talk a little to my best friends when they asked.

Friends: I had friends all the way through elementary school (not girls, they are too noisy) but became really close to them when I got into 6th grade. They were the best part of going to school in my local area as we played a lot together after school at one another's houses.

Am I glad my parents decided to send me to a Japanese elementary school? Yes! I made lots of friends where I live and that was great. Then because I had an education in Japanese as well as doing English at home, I was able to get into a great high school. I am happy about my life.

Homework: I used to finish my homework at after-school care up to Grade 4, and then from 5th grade, I would stay in after class and finish it before going home. When it came closer to my high school entrance exam, my teacher helped me with extra coaching. One thing I didn't realize was that I should have spent more time reviewing the work that I had done every week and studying harder before tests. Homework in elementary school was easy compared to high school.

Language level in comparison to my friends: I felt that my level was the same, but sometimes when my friends were joking about something they had seen on TV- some slogan or current phrase or gesture, I didn't know it as I hadn't seen it on TV. I think that most Japanese comedy shows are pretty simple anyway and not that funny. I watch more videos in English than Japanese TV, so I guess it couldn't be helped.

Music: I really liked music because I got to play some different instruments and sing songs. It also helped that my teacher for 5/6th grade could play the guitar and we enjoyed listening to him or singing

along.

Sport: We got to do sport about 3-4 times a week, which was great, but I would have liked it to be a bit more challenging. The equipment wasn't very good and the sports lessons were aimed at the kids who couldn't do it that well.

Subjects: My favourite subject was P.E. and least liked subject, Science. We hardly ever got to do experiments in Science. When we did, it was fun, but it mostly involved a lot of memorization on parts of a microscope and various facts.

Teachers: All the teachers I had in the beginning were hysterical shouting teachers, so I didn't think they were very good. My last teacher, however, was enthusiastic, offering to take us out on an excursion on a Sunday to see all the historical spots in our local area. (He has even organized an overnight camp since we have all started at junior high school.) He would stay in the classroom everyday to help slow learners to catch up with homework and provide extra study hints on maths, hold debates in class, help us to get involved in using the computer to write stories and lots of other things. I really respected him.

Senri International School: In January 2000, we sent in an application to Senri International School (SIS) in Mino, Osaka, for me to enter the junior high school from April 2000. I had to go for an entrance examination, individual interview and group interview before being accepted into the school. The test was hard and there was a 1 in 6 chance of getting in. The school is actually divided into two parts: the Osaka International School (OIS) and my half of the school (SIS). OIS is for education primarily in English from kindergarten to the end of high school. At SIS lessons are mainly in Japanese according to the *Monbusho* curriculum, except for English, Art, Music and P.E., which are conducted in English. There are kids in my class who have been to different countries and speak a variety of languages as well as those who have gone through the normal Japanese education system and cannot speak another language. It is the most expensive private high school in Osaka, as far as fees go (approximately 900,000 yen a year).

Bullying: None so far.

Class number: I have 15 students in my Year 7 class. There are 3 classes in total, all with less than 17. In my class there are 5 boys and 10 girls. In my English class, I have 10 students. It's really good because the teacher gets to know us really well, but they also have plenty of time to check our homework every lesson and if you haven't done it you're in big trouble.

Clubs: I joined the triathlon club. I can do it 4 times a week if I want to, but at the moment with all the traveling I am doing to and from school as well as the homework, I only go twice a week to practice swimming in the indoor pool, running and cycling. I love doing sport.

Disadvantages: It takes me 1 hour 20 minutes to get to school (bicycle, train, walking) and so I am really tired by the time I get home; although after 2 months, I feel as though I am getting used to the pace. There is a lot of homework, but rather than memorizing facts, I am doing different things. I did a project on Osaka Castle and went there during Golden Week to investigate the history, take a video and discover things about it. I then typed it up on the computer.

Feeling a part of the school: I immediately felt as though I was at home. So many people spoke 2 or more languages and were from different backgrounds that I was no longer the odd man out. I was one of a unique crowd of people.

Friends: As there are only 5 boys in the class and we will be together for 3 years, we have to get along. I have made friends with them already and I think it will work out fine. It is hard now to meet with them and play on the weekends because everyone still lives in different directions. I still play with my friends from elementary school on the weekends.

Am I glad my parents decided to send me to this school? Yes, I am really enjoying it and one of the best things is being able to go into the library and find great books in English as well as in Japanese. I prefer reading in English because the selection of books is terrific.

Homework: There is a lot of homework, particularly with English. There are 3 levels of English: Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced and I am in the Advanced level. With all classes there is a lot of homework but my English ability is really improving. I have vocabulary homework, journal writing, plays, character discussions. I am learning a lot.

Language level in comparison to my friends: I am lucky because I can understand when the lessons are in Japanese or English.

Music: This is in English and we practice in a choir for music. At the moment we are singing church songs and every song has a "Gloria" or "In Excelsius" in it. The kids who don't know any English think that "Gloria" is "go-ri-ra" (gorilla) and so it is hilarious to be singing with a bunch of gorillas.

Sport: So far, we have practiced in the pool with snorkel gear, worked on our football passes and thrown the frisbee.

Subjects: My favourite subject is English. There are only 2 of us from Grade 7, the others are from Grades 8 and 9 so I get to make friends with others ahead of me. I enjoy all my subjects, the jokes the teachers make and the opportunity to hear lots of English.

Teachers: My homeroom teacher is also my triathlon club coach and he is a great athlete. I hope I can be like him. I like all my teachers and the atmosphere in my classes is good.

Final comment: When I was in elementary school I wanted to go back to the Australian school for longer because I thought that it was a much more easy going place to be. However, now I go to SIS I don't want to leave. I really feel as though I can get a great education in both Japanese and English and both languages are important to me.

L1/L2 Education at an International School

William Lawrenz and Yasuko Lawrenz

Introduction

Canadian Academy (CA) is an international school located in Kobe. It is a K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) school with an enrollment of about 775 students, with around 370 students in the elementary school. The language of instruction in school is English, and the school basically follows North American curricula. The school was originally founded in 1913 by Canadian missionaries who wanted to provide education for their own children. Over the years, the school's population has become quite diverse.

The current student population represents a total of about 30 different nationalities with approximately 40% from North America, 40% from Asia, and 20 % from Europe. On the playground, students can use their L1s, but many of them use English because it is a common language that all their peers can understand.

At each grade level, 10% to 30% of the students are Japanese language speakers. Some of them are Japanese L1 speakers, some of them are Japanese-English balanced bilinguals, some of them are Japanese returnees. It is difficult to measure statistically the numbers of bilingual students and their varying levels of English ability and Japanese ability because of CA students' transient population. Because of parents' reasons, many students come and go out of CA. For example, a 6 year old, who used to attend a Japanese public kindergarten may join CA in first grade, and 3 years later, her family gets transferred to France where she attends another international school there for 2 years, and in 5th grade, she returns to CA. Not all CA students are in this type of situation, but there are many students with many different linguistic backgrounds.

English is the official language of instruction at CA. All subjects are taught in the English language as the school's mission is to prepare its students to eventually enter universities in North America or other English speaking countries. However, the school encourages its students to respect the local (Japanese) culture and language as well. In addition to the main curriculum of teaching all subjects in English, CA also has a Japanese language program for its students. In the elementary school, Japanese language classes are offered for 30 minutes every day. Although the curriculum does not follow the *Monbusho* curriculum, excerpts from *Monbusho* textbooks are occasionally used when appropriate. The elementary school's Japanese language program has gone through some modifications in the past few years, providing greater support for the language development of bilingual students.

Historical Perspective

In order to enter CA, students and their parents go through an admission process. Upon admission, students whose English language proficiency is limited, are required to receive ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) assistance regularly in addition to studying in mainstream homerooms.

Historically, the ESOL session time overlapped with the Japanese language session time. When most elementary students were attending the Japanese language classes, the ESOL students were sent elsewhere for ESOL sessions. Therefore, Japanese-English bilingual children whose English was still classified as needing ESOL assistance, were not able to attend the Japanese language classes. For many of these children, Japanese was their L1, and not being able to study their mother-tongue in school was a concern for some parents. At the same time, despite the number of years that these children received ESOL support, it was felt that some of them continued to struggle with their English proficiency even during their high school years.

Program Change

In 1999, the school decided to address these issues by making some changes to the ESOL and Japanese language programs. The ESOL program had traditionally pulled ESOL students out (pull-out) from the mainstream classroom for ESOL assistance. With the pull-out method, some ESOL students felt that they missed out a lot on what other students did in the mainstream class while ESOL students

were gone to their ESOL teachers' rooms. Therefore, the program was changed so that ESOL teachers would come into the mainstream classrooms and help the ESOL students while the homeroom teacher was giving instruction to the whole class. In addition, the ESOL schedule was changed so that it would not conflict with the Japanese class time. Students were now able to receive ESOL assistance in the homeroom in the morning, for example, and they could not attend Japanese classes in the afternoon every day.

This program change concurs with the modern bilingualism research which states that consolidation of L1 is crucial in the development of the L2 (Collier, 1989, Cummins & Swain, 1986, Nakajima, 2001, Sears, 1998). Allowing students to continue developing their L1, (while acquiring L2) is not only beneficial in terms of their linguistic development, but also emotional and cultural development. These students benefit from studying Japanese because it is important for developing their bicultural identity.

Bilingualism studies from North America suggest that students who receive L1 instruction achieve better scores in L2 (English) on tests not only of reading ability but also other subjects such as math and science (Collier, 1989).

Current Situation

It has been 2 years since the program change was made. To study the effect of the change, we interviewed the teachers who were directly involved. In doing so, we faced a challenge that reflects the reality of an international school community - the transient and mobile nature of its students and teachers. Particularly in the school year 1999-2000, there was a large shift in the faculty members and it was difficult to find teachers who have been at CA long enough to have been able to note the effect of program change. In fact, there were only 10 out of 70 teachers in the elementary school who had been CA longer than three years. These 10 teachers included mainstream classroom teachers, ESOL teachers and Japanese teachers.

Teachers' Response

The teachers who have been at CA long enough to have seen the change in the program note the following:

- 2 years is not long enough to see a significant improvement in students' performance
- in theory, L1 support makes sense, but in reality, it is not certain that L1 support is really helping the L2 development
- I have not observed much improvement in students' English ability since the change
- ESOL and Japanese and main classroom teaching all need to be more coordinated for consistency to make a true improvement.

The above responses represent opinions that were shared by the majority of the respondents.

Standardized Tests

In order to evaluate the students' academic performance, CA gives the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) to all students in grades 3, 5, and 7. As the name suggests, ITBS is developed in the United States and is commonly used by U.S. elementary and middle schools. Most teachers interviewed stated that they feel that the current testing done at CA may not be the most appropriate test for international school students because of its cultural (US) biases. However, according to the school mission, CA is

committed to serve its expatriate population by providing education in the English language and to prepare its students for universities in North America and other English speaking countries. Therefore, perhaps it is inevitable and to be expected that the standardized tests originate in those English speaking countries.

Conclusion

Although there still are some issues and challenges, CA's recent program change seems to be in the right direction for supporting its bilingual and bicultural students. Whether the school will modify its aim of preparing students for tertiary level education in English is not certain as it depends on various factors such as the needs of its expatriate population and the socioeconomic situations of its community. Hopefully, a school like CA will be widening its scope to cater for an ever increasing population of Japanese children who are competent speakers of English.

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Four Children and Four Different Educational Routes

Venetia Stanley-Smith

One of the things that has concerned me for the past twenty-eight years is the best method for parents to help their children to become not only bilingual, but also biliterate. I am English and I have four children who have all grown up in Japan. My two daughters are now 27 and 26, and my two sons are 23 and 7. My first three children have a Japanese father who can barely speak any English; hence I learnt Japanese very fast! My present husband speaks English fairly well; at least, he can follow the conversation when I speak to his son (my youngest child) in English. So I do not feel that I am leaving him out of the conversation, which is great, as it makes it easier to speak English at home with my other children and my two grandchildren.

When someone asks me what is the best way to help children to become bilingual, I still do not really know the answer. It depends on so many things such as: where you will eventually live, the personality and wishes of the child, the availability of schooling nearby, the income of the family, and the effort and patience of the parents and relatives. For me, it was a personal wish at first because my first

three children started off with Japanese as their "mother tongue". This made me feel really distant from them at times, especially when they entered higher grades of Japanese elementary school and I realised that I could not understand what they were saying. My husband was out of work and so looked after the children while I was busy commuting to Osaka to teach English. We lived in Nagaoka, a small suburban town between Kyoto and Osaka. So I had very little time, other than the weekends, to be with the children. They went first to Japanese kindergarten and then on to the nearby school. Their English was minimal and we mainly spoke Japanese at home.

When Satya, my eldest daughter was eight, I realised that I had to do something about their English. A friend told me that it would be hard for them to survive, even in Japan, if they could not speak English. People would expect them to speak it as they were "double" and would think it strange if they did not. Also, when I first took them back to England, my family was astounded that they could not speak any English. It was at that time that the kids themselves realised that it was a shame that they could not speak English.

My second daughter, Julie, was having trouble at school remembering kanji, and was always being kept back after school to have private tutorials with her teacher. I suspected that she might have a learning disability. She was very unhappy at school and when I told her teacher that she may have dyslexia, I found out that no one had any idea what that was. I decided that she might find English easier - with only 26 letters she may find it easier to remember. I asked the Kyoto International School (KIS) if she could start there even though she was already ten and had very little English. Jean Stewart, the principal at that time and a very gifted teacher, decided to take up the challenge and let her in. She was marvelous with Julie, giving up a lot of her time to teach her, cutting out sand paper letters and making alphabet cookies. Little by little, Julie began to read the letters of the alphabet. Jean taught her at her own pace and she joined a group of children younger than her, but nobody called her "*baka*" (stupid) as they had at the Japanese school. She began to make friends, gain confidence, and settle down in her school life.

A year later, Satya had had enough of the bullying at her school and decided to switch too. So at the age of 12 she started to learn English, and for her it was quite a struggle. So I decided to send her away for a year to an English boarding school. She learnt English, but she did not like it there, complaining of the food, the spartan British routine, and the fact that she felt she just did not fit in. Still, it gave her a boost in her English and when she got back to Japan, she was able to keep up with her peers and to follow the curriculum to some extent.

Meanwhile, I had started my own English conversation school in Kyoto in 1978. In the beginning, it was so that I could be at home when the children came home. But with all these private school fees, I suddenly needed to generate enough money to pay for everything. My husband was still unemployed and seemed to be happy being a househusband! So every time my children changed schools, I made some more classes to cover the costs, and by then I was teaching 7-8 hours a day. As the children were just starting with English, they needed help with their homework. I was teaching every evening and so I hired foreign students to come as tutors for 2-3 hours each day.

Finally, my older son Shuji, who was quite enjoying Japanese school, decided to switch too in

the second grade. At eight years old he thought it was unfair that his sisters did not have to go to school on Saturdays and that they could take a prepared brown rice lunch box to school. All my children were vegetarian and in those days you were expected to eat everything at school. Shuji came home with his trouser pockets stuck together with meat croquettes or fried fish because he secretly dropped the food in them. So one day he announced that he wanted to go to Kyoto International School too.

With three children at international school it was a heavy sum to pay, but by then I was committed to giving them the chance to become bilingual. It became a passion: reading to them in English every night, taking them all away to the UK and Ireland every summer so that they could play with their cousins in English, renting English videos, turning off the Japanese TV when I was with them, inviting their friends from school to stay, and so on.

After about four years they became bilingual, but the biggest hurdle was biliteracy. Shuji switched at the youngest age and so he found it easy to read English. He loved *Tintin* books and devoured them every night, and at the same time kept reading his Japanese comics. The girls were not so interested in reading, especially Julie whose learning disability had been diagnosed as "short memory". I thought it would be better for her to give up Japanese and concentrate on English. At this time, I was thinking that I would leave Japan one day and settle down in England with the children. So I was more concerned about their English literacy skills. Sadly, Jean Stewart retired as headmistress and a new principal was employed. She was quite unaware of the situation in Japan and started to make some changes. She closed down the promised high school programme and informed me that Julie would not be able to continue at the school as there were no specialist remedial teachers to teach her. Stunned, suddenly Satya had to go to the Canadian Academy (CA) for her high schooling while I searched around all the schools available in the Kansai area for Julie, but was turned down at every door. So I had to look for other options.

After a year and a half at CA, Satya felt out of place. Everyone's family was so much more affluent and the girls were a little snobbish, she said. She started not to want to go to school and sleep in all mornings. She was fifteen at the time. Julie was very hurt at not being allowed to study at KIS and wanted to have friends, not study with a tutor at home. At this time, I think it was the most difficult, my husband and I separated and I took the kids with me to a new location one minute's walk away. The children had agreed to a divorce as long as they could see us both every day. At that point I decided that Shuji should leave KIS too as I did not want him to change to a high school programme at fifteen and find that his level was too low, which is what Satya had experienced when she started at CA. Osaka International School (OIS) had just been built and when we went to see it, he was so impressed that he decided to enter immediately. Even though it took nearly two hours to commute, he really loved going there. There were fine teachers and wonderfully designed buildings and facilities. The system was great. He studied all subjects in English, but went to the Osaka International Academy to study Japanese with Japanese children his own age who were returnees or, like him, born and raised in Japan and needing Japanese literacy.

Meanwhile, Satya had decided to go to a Quaker school in upstate New York called Oakwood with a friend from CA. She particularly wanted to go there so that she could further her study of tap dancing. Her English fluency and literacy greatly improved during the years she was there. After

graduating, she returned to Kyoto to study woodblock printing and entered Seika University. She was able to get into the university very easily. She only needed a recommendation from her teacher. It cost about 1,500,000 yen a year. She really enjoyed her time there and made lots of Japanese friends, but lamented the fact that she could not read and write Japanese better. Fortunately, one her friends from her Japanese school was there and corrected or rewrote her reports for her. Satya now has a small school in Kyushu where she teaches English to children. She also teaches at an international kindergarten. She says she likes teaching children and does not have enough confidence in her spelling to teach adults.

Julie went to a boarding school in New Zealand where one of my oldest friends was head of the English department and she was able to stay with his family. She was there for four years and very homesick, but they had a special remedial reading programme for dyslexic children which helped her read at the level of a 12 year old elementary school child. After graduation, she returned to Japan and is living with us with her 18-month-old son, Joe. She now says she wishes she knew how to read Japanese as she needs it in her daily life here.

Shuji, after graduating from OIS at 18, got into Balliol College, Oxford. He was accepted after passing a tough interview and the International Baccalaureate in three subjects. This is actually harder than taking A-Levels in Britain. He has been there for four years and has got a first class degree in chemistry. It has been very expensive for him to study at Oxford because he is classed as an overseas student. The annual cost, including board and living expenses, was about 18,000 pounds. However, Oxford University has now given him as full scholarship so he will start a PhD in Radical Chemistry there in September 2001. His Japanese is good, although my husband says he makes a few mistakes in kanji!

I remarried in 1992 and we now have a seven-year-old son called Eugene. I have spoken to him in English since he was born. He attended the kindergarten at KIS so English became his mother tongue. We bought an old farmhouse in Ohara and so decided to send him to the local Japanese elementary school. He's now in the second grade, and although at first he had a problem with the many new Japanese words he was hearing, has settled down pretty well. My husband really wants him to be educated in Japanese as we will probably stay in Japan. All my children seem to want to stay here so he thinks that Japanese is more important. However, we both want to take Eugene away to an English speaking country every year to keep up his English. He has private lessons in English to study reading, but right now his focus is on learning Japanese. Now I feel that I will probably be here in Japan forever, so it would be nice to follow this path with Eugene. I know that sometimes it is a tough decision to decide which way to go, but all I can say is look clearly at your situation and how it will affect your child in the future. Shuji manages to speak and write two languages. He was lucky. The timing was right for him, and together with his interest in reading and his high motivation to study, he was blessed with the ability to do well. He never went to a *juku* (cram school). It came to him naturally. I think we need to see how our children really are, help them to find their inner gifts and be there to help them on their way.

The Educational Experiences of a Multilingual Family

Aline Koza

Before having children, I never imagined that education and schooling could become such an issue. When you have children and when they reach the proper age, you send them to the local public school where they learn how to write, read and count. Full stop. Now, trying to raise our French-Japanese children in Japan, I am finding out that it is a much more complex problem.

Yoichi and I speak Japanese, French and English. We have two children: Yaël, our seven year-old daughter and Simon, our four year-old son. When she was about 1 year old, Yaël started at day care in Kyoto where she stayed until she was about five. Once a week, she was also going to a French playgroup where activities were organised by a French teacher. Both our children have always been bilingual, French and Japanese. I always talk to my children in French and Yoichi speaks to them mostly in Japanese and sometimes in French. Although Yaël's first language is probably Japanese, she has always kept a good balance between both French and Japanese. Now that she can read, she spends hours reading books of either language. Simon's first language seems to be French, maybe because he did not go to a Japanese day care and stayed longer at home, but he is at ease with Japanese as well. Both of them never mixed the two languages and always answer in whichever language is spoken to them.

Yoichi had an opportunity to work in a South African university for two years and in 1999 we all moved to Stellenbosch, a small town near Cape Town. And that's when we had to make our first real choice regarding schools. There was no full time Japanese school nearby and the French school was in Cape Town, 40 km away from Yoichi's workplace. After visiting a couple of kindergartens, we opted for the Stellenbosch Waldorf School, a school which is based on Rudolf Steiner principles. It is a small English speaking school (about one hundred pupils) located in a beautiful environment. Yaël adapted very quickly. Although her English was almost non-existent at the beginning, she never said she did not want to go to school. The timing was also perfect: she had one more year in kindergarten to get used to the language before starting primary school. At home, we continued to speak Japanese and French, although we definitely felt more relaxed about the language issue. In South Africa, being multilingual is quite common, even among children, and our children were very happy and proud of speaking French and Japanese.

The Steiner schools have a very specific approach to children's education and it had very positive effects on our children. Yaël really bloomed and was happy there. They put a lot of emphasis on creativity and Yaël brought home very beautiful drawings and other work. They also learn at a slower pace, which in our case worked out perfectly as it enabled us to start a French education correspondence course at home without putting too much pressure on our daughter. I must admit that during the two years in South Africa, we neglected the Japanese a bit. We were going back to Japan anyway.... Simon also started to go to the kindergarten while in South Africa; so before returning to Japan, his first language (mother tongue) was French and his second language (play language) was English. Japanese was his third language: he understood very well, but very often would reply in English. By the end of our stay in Stellenbosch, we all used a bit of English in the home on a daily basis. The children were playing together

more and more in English and Yoichi and I also started to use English with the children sometimes.

The return to Japan and the re-adaptation to Japanese life turned out to be quite tough. According to the Japanese school calendar, Yaël was at the end of first grade and Simon still in kindergarten. Our original plan for schooling was to enrol Yaël in the French school in Kyoto and Simon in a Japanese kindergarten where he could brush up his Japanese a bit.

Let me now introduce the French school in Kyoto. It is a very small, new school, which started as a full time school about three years ago. It now has two classes, a kindergarten class and a primary class, which includes all grades of primary school. The total number of children is 23 at the moment. Although the French school is a private school, it is acknowledged by the French government and receives subsidies. So while it is expensive compared to a public school, it is still less than half the price of Kyoto International School. Pupils also have the possibility of applying for a scholarship from the French government, which is an important point in these days of economical recession when children enrolled in international schools may have to go back to public schools for financial reasons. Its curriculum also includes a minimum of 3 hours of Japanese per week, so the children can receive a truly bilingual education.

Then decision time came. Yaël strongly expressed the desire to go to the local Japanese elementary school (in our case Kamitakano *shogakko*) and we decided to respect her choice, the only condition being that we would continue to do the French at home. So, in the end, Yaël joined the local primary school and Simon is now going to the kindergarten of the French school. In a way, the balance between both languages is maintained.

Yaël had a very hard time the first three months fitting into the Japanese system, but her teacher was very supportive and Yaël has a very strong will. She completely refused the help Yoichi offered to catch up on the Japanese and we had to let her go at her own pace. It was very painful to watch and many times we wondered if we had made the right choice. We also had to stop the French correspondence course as it was becoming too heavy a burden on her. After the new school year started, things became a bit easier, and Yaël regained her confidence. She is now happy at school again. We also have started to work on the French once more, although not as intensively as before.

Simon fitted into the French kindergarten very easily and his Japanese has also improved dramatically. The majority of the children in his class have at least one Japanese parent and, although all the activities and interactions with the teacher are in French, a Japanese assistant helps the teacher in the kindergarten class and the children often play in Japanese among themselves. Thanks to the French school, Yaël and Simon often play together in French and to see Simon speak French so well is also an incentive for Yaël to persevere in her home study of French. I am sure that if Simon were going to a Japanese kindergarten, it would have been very hard to keep some French at home.

So, although having the two children in two different systems can be sometimes difficult for practical reasons (the school holidays are not exactly the same, etc.), I guess that for the time being we have reached a kind of balance between both cultures and languages. But the road is still long: what do we do when Yaël will have to go to junior high school? Will Simon go to the French primary school or join Yaël in her school?

Education is really a very complex issue but I think that it is very important to keep an open mind. I, personally, never had a good impression from the Japanese school system and I am still very often shocked by what Yaël brings home from school (all the little rules like how and where to write the children's name on the swimming costume, the load of summer holiday homework, etc.). But, I am also seeing the good sides of it now and I can't honestly say that the French education system is better.

I am writing this article in South Africa where we are all here again, partly, on holidays. Yaël goes to her old school once a week and plays with her old friends most afternoons. It is only six months since we left and returned to Japan, but during those six months the children's English vocabulary shrank. However, it took only a week of being in South Africa to come back. We do not really want to raise "multilingual" children and it does not really matter if the children end up forgetting their English. There will always be English-speaking friends visiting our house and I am sure that their ear will stay familiar with the sound of English. For us, having happy and confident children is the most important. I think that for bi-national children to be comfortable with their identity, they need to know the cultures of both parents, and the language is only one part of it.

Home Schooling in the U.S.A. and Japanese Elementary School

David Carlson

(Abridged from an article which appeared in *BJ* Vol.9, No. 3 May/June 2000)

Introduction

I am a US citizen; my wife, Keiko, is Japanese. Our daughter, Emily, (who is now ten-and-a-half years old) is a dual-citizen. Keiko and I have followed the one-parent/one-language approach with Emily since her birth.

When we lived in the US, Emily never attended an American school. For a little over two years she went to the Japanese School of Detroit on Saturdays, where she studied Japanese and mathematics. That was for about 6 hours per week. Otherwise she spent most of her first nine years growing and learning without an institutional education. In other words she home schooled.

Our home schooling approach was somewhat of a hybrid. When I was around, Emily tended toward "unschooling", a type of home schooling without textbooks, workbooks or drills, and without studying by the clock. Instead she followed her interests and did a wide variety of activities, many with me, including gardening, construction projects, swimming, volunteer work, hiking, cooking, reading, playing baseball, building rockets and airplanes, going on trips, and playing piano duets among other things. Many of the things she did she probably would not have experienced if she had been confined to a classroom each day.

My wife, on the other hand, tended more toward a structured "schooling at home" involvement, making daily study assignments and organizing groups for Emily and other Japanese children who came to our house to study and play. Keiko also arranged for Emily to attend a *Kumon* math center, run by a bilingual Japanese-American university professor, as well as for Emily to attend the

Japanese Saturday School. But Keiko also talked a lot with Emily, which gave Emily an opportunity to also express in Japanese the many things she did each day using English.

Because my wife and I had fairly light work schedules and a lot of free time (I taught college night classes; Keiko taught at the Japanese Saturday School), both of us were about equally involved in Emily's home schooling. Also, because we were in a part of the US with a large Japanese community, Emily had many Japanese friends, as well as American friends. As a result, most days she was able to use both of her first languages and interact with many native speakers of each language in a wide variety of situations.

In short, while we were in the US, Emily lived in what I think was a wonderful environment for growing up bilingual. At the time of our move to Japan in 1998, she was fluent in both languages in a wide range of situations.

Big Changes

In 1998, I received a sudden invitation by my former employer in Japan to return as a tenured faculty member. While I was initially delighted by the invitation, both my wife and I knew that moving back to Japan (we had lived in Japan twice before) would mean major changes in our family life. Also, we knew it would mean drastic changes for Emily's learning since the balanced-bilingual home schooling that we had been doing in the US would be difficult for us in Japan. As far as I was concerned, there was only one condition for my accepting the offer: my university had to make some arrangement for my daughter's education, and sending her off to an international school 250 km away in Tokyo was unacceptable. The local schools in the area, notorious for bullying, were also out of the question.

To my surprise, my employer came through. Until then, I had been unaware that the education department at the nearby national university ran an experimental school. But the director of my university made some arrangements, and the next thing we knew Emily was cleared to attend. After visiting the school, my wife and I had good feelings about most of what we observed; for a school, it was acceptable. Emily, however, wasn't very excited about going to school, but that was mainly because she did not want to leave all of her friends in the US. But after talking things over, we decided to move. We made a quick trip back to the US to sell our house and many of our possessions, as well as to say our goodbyes, and then in August 1998 we found ourselves living on the outskirts of Matsumoto, in a sleepy little hamlet called Asama Onsen.

Emily's schooling

Before we could enroll Emily in school, we had to decide what name she should use. Christened Emily Terada Carlson, she was accustomed to using Emily Carlson in English-speaking contexts, and 寺田絵美里 (*TERADA Emiri*) in Japanese ones. These are her official names in the US and Japan, respectively, although thankfully the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs also recognizes her as "Terada (Carlson) Emily" for passport purposes. (Terada, incidentally, is my wife's maiden name.) As I was present when we went to enroll Emily for school, the administrators assumed that she would use my surname and be called 絵美里カールソン (*Emiri KAARUSON*). When I expressed concern that being the only child with a foreign-sounding surname in a Japanese school might present difficulties for my daughter, the staff tried to assure me that there would be no problem. Nevertheless, I insisted that she use

her Japanese name.

I am glad that I did. Although the staff may have been open-minded, the students certainly weren't. For many months, some of Emily's classmates delighted in referring to Emily as "American" (in other words, "not Japanese.") Emily, who had always thought of herself as both American and Japanese, was noticeably affected by her classmates remarks, and I have no doubt that using her American name, as well as having it emblazoned in katakana on every piece of clothing and school equipment would only have given the students more opportunities for comment.

Next came the adjustments. One of the first big adjustments for all of us was to the length of Emily's school day. On a typical day, she leaves the house at 7:10 and gets home around 4:30. Then, of course, there is a half-day of school every other Saturday, as well. Quite frankly, I believe that Japanese children spend far too much of their childhood in the very narrow confines of school, leaving them with relatively little time for outside activities or for valuable social interaction with people other than same-age peers or a teacher. As a home schooler, Emily had a far richer social life, regularly interacting with people of all ages from a wide variety of backgrounds. Furthermore, by the time she now comes home from school, does her homework, eats dinner, and takes a bath, there is relatively little time for anything else – including using English – during the week.

Another big adjustment for Emily was to the extremely closed nature of her school, and to the students' hostility toward new-comers. One feature of the experimental school she attends is that each class of students stays together for all 6 years in the elementary program. Accordingly, the children tend to be very clannish and unwilling to accept newcomers. Emily certainly felt excluded, and there were many days during her first few months when she didn't want to go to school. There were many days when I could sense her pain and was half-tempted to simply pack up and take the family back to the US. It took Emily close to a year to make any close friends. The students started to accept her only after another child, a boy, entered the class. No longer the new kid, Emily was slowly allowed to join the group, and it was the newest student's turn to be ostracized. Emily, who felt some solidarity and compassion toward the new child, began to play with him, but that only caused some of her classmates to tease her again. In addition to the taunts, Emily also briefly experienced some physical abuse at school. By the time I found out about it, however, her share of the abuse had ended.

I recall a rather poignant story that Emily wrote in her journal from that time. It concerned an alligator who had different markings from other alligators. After repeatedly being told that he was different, the alligator set out from home. During his journey, he happened to meet another alligator who also had different markings, and the two became fast friends. There were subsequent installments of the story in her journal, and the two alligators went through various ordeals together.

Since Emily started attending school in Japan, I have noticed some changes in how she views herself. Some of the changes, no doubt, are just a part of growing up. But the change in her environment has also had some effect. In the US, she took her sense of cultural identity for granted. The topic of cultural identity rarely came up, but when it did, Emily openly spoke of herself as being both American and Japanese. As far as I know, no one in the US ever told her she wasn't American or Japanese. Her close Japanese friends in the US all had a very positive attitude toward both America and

Japan, and toward both languages. It was only in Japan when children at her school in Japan began to suggest that somehow Emily wasn't really Japanese, that I saw her begin to grapple with her cultural identity.

During Emily's first year of attending school in Japan, she often did whatever was necessary to try to be the same as everyone else and not stand out in any way. Because even the slightest hint of difference gave her classmates additional fodder for attacking Emily, she tried very hard to conform. Clothes that she had enjoyed wearing in the US were no longer all right because they made her stand out. Everything she took to school had to be the same as everyone else's.

It was an incident involving a bicycle helmet that first made her desire to conform really apparent to me. For bicycle safety day, the children were asked to bring a helmet to school. Emily took her helmet, a very nice one that we had brought from America. While all of her classmates had the exact same construction-worker-style helmet, only Emily has a western-style racing helmet. That evening after school she mentioned she was the only who had a different helmet, so I thought about buying her a Japanese-style helmet, too. But somehow I never got around to it. (I think the fact that Japanese bicycle helmets are so ugly had something to do with it.) Anyway, the following year, the children took their helmets to school again, although the second time Emily's reaction after the event was different. The American helmet was now fine; standing out no longer seemed to bother her as much. Not long after that my wife pointed out to me that Emily enjoys wearing American clothes to school once again. And when her friends from school come over to play, she now likes to show them the things she brought from the States.

On a few occasions I have considered broaching the subject of these changes and of cultural identity with Emily. But something seems forced since the initiative isn't coming from her. I have always resisted the temptation to ask Emily leading questions about language and culture, or to do anything that would turn my relationship with my daughter into a research project. Why Emily's attitude toward "things American" has changed recently, I cannot say. But when she is ready to talk about it, I'll be eager to listen.

And what about English?

Emily has been in contact with English and Japanese almost every day of her life since birth. In linguistic parlance, that makes her a "simultaneous bilingual." While this is a useful concept at one level, one doesn't ordinarily use two languages simultaneously. Looking at Emily's bilingual situation, I have always found it more useful to think in terms of the degree of "consecutiveness" or alternation of language use. As a home schooler in the US, for instance, Emily was constantly alternating between her two languages, probably hundreds of times most days. As she interacted with different people, the number of alternations between Japanese and English was truly amazing, and it would be impossible to achieve in most classroom situations.

Now, in Japan, Emily is still in daily contact with both languages, but the pattern of use is quite different. On schooldays, she now uses both languages in rapid succession during just two blocks of time: before school and after school, or from 6:00 to 7:15 am, and again from 5:00 to 8:30pm. During these two times, Emily and I talk and read together in English. And she also uses Japanese with her

mother during that time. On weekends, there are sometimes other opportunities for her to use English, such as with friends who live nearby or with visitors. This past year, we also spent about 35 days in the US, where Emily used mainly English, except for with her Japanese friends and with my wife. But otherwise, she uses only Japanese for most of the time on schooldays.

Because Emily's English was so well-rooted in her first 8-and-a-half years, her English skills, particularly her speaking and listening, are solid, and they have shown no sign of regression since moving to Japan. In fact, I would say that in many ways her English continues to progress. I attribute this continued growth largely to the fact that she and I read together for about an hour almost every weekday, and even longer on weekends. We tend to read challenging novels, and I find that reading and discussion introduce a far richer variety of language than one encounters in daily conversation, in videos, or on television.

I also believe the fact that Emily knows English, a language widely seen to have value or prestige, has some bearing on her keeping two languages in Japan. Some of Emily's classmates, many of whom have to attend English lessons after school, now tell Emily how lucky she is to already know the language. There have even been times when her teacher, unable to understand something written in English, has asked Emily for assistance in front of the class.

The only English skill that doesn't get much use these days is her writing. Given the limited time Emily has for any additional activities due to her long school day, writing in English has not been a high priority. She does exchange notes with friends in the US and Australia, send an occasional e-mail to grandma and grandpa, and write shopping lists and memos for me. But that is about the extent of her writing since coming to Japan.

Now well into her second year in Japan, Emily seems to be doing well overall. In general she has made the adjustment from balanced bilingual home schooling in the US to monolingual schooling in Japan.

As Time Flies By

Right now Emily seems to enjoy school. There may be some things that I personally don't like about schooling, and I know that home schooling can be far superior to institutional education. But for a school, the place she now attends is all right. The curriculum at her particular school, since it is an experimental program, is very relaxed. And her teacher, who will probably stay with Emily's class through the 6th grade, is a wonderful person.

The only question my wife and I have about our daughter's education is what to do when Emily reaches middle-school age in another 2 years. Although Emily's current school also has a middle school program, my wife and I have serious concerns about the middle school. The curriculum suddenly shifts from an experimental elementary school program stressing individuality, creativity and compassion to an oppressive cramming-oriented curriculum, aiming at getting students into the "best" high schools. The reason for the sudden shift is that the middle-school teachers believe there is a lack of academic rigor in the elementary program. So they try to make up for lost time by driving the students. Although many parents say that they are dissatisfied with the middle-school curriculum, the teachers simply respond by saying, "If you don't like the way we teach, send your child to a different school."

So I think we may – if we can find one. Or perhaps, Emily will home school once again. In a few years my work schedule should be more relaxed, so I could once again be actively involved in home schooling. In fact, this past year I have made contact with many people involved in alternative education in Japan – home schooling children and their parents, support teachers, and home school group coordinators – and I believe that bilingual home schooling is very do-able in Japan.

Education Choices in Japan: Alternatives to Regular Schooling

Jacoba Akazawa

(Adapted from an article which appeared in *BJ* Vol. 9 No. 1 January/February 2000)

Regular Japanese schools and International schools are not the only options for our children in Japan. At present, my children, aged 11 and 8, go to Planet School, an alternative Japanese school in Kyoto part time and are home schooling the rest of the time. It is interesting how our lives evolve and our ideas change. I never dreamt, when I started my teaching career in an Australian public high school 23 years ago, that things would be any different if I ever had children. I also never dreamt that I would be lucky enough to marry a Japanese and be living in Kyoto for a big part of my life. When I came to Japan, I was working at Kyoto International School as the Grade 2 and 3 teacher for five years. We then moved to Australia for five years where I worked in a public Distance Education Program (home schooling) for Grades 1 through to 12.

I had always wondered what the ideal education was, but my whole philosophy on education changed when, in Australia, our eldest child started in a Rudolf Steiner school. I could then understand what holistic education was all about; something my husband had advocated all along. Singing, art, movement, play, writing stories, gardening, craft, Japanese, German; all as important as each other with no tests! School was fun and there was no way anyone wanted to miss a day.

We have been back in Kyoto now for nearly five years and all is going well and it looks as though we'll stay longer. It was tough at first to figure out what to do with the children's schooling, as holistic education is still important to us and there are no Rudolf Steiner schools in Kyoto. So we opted for home schooling; but being the parents responsible for the schooling is very different to being the teacher sending out work, as I had done when working on the Distance Education Program in Australia. However, working in universities as I do now, gives me two long holidays a year to concentrate on the English part of their schooling. There are many home schooling programs available, but the Oak Meadow syllabus, which is Steiner based, suits me best. During my holidays, I try to spend about 3 hours a day on schooling with the children. I thoroughly enjoy this time together as it is a time for re-bonding, but also because the curriculum I follow is very interesting and I learn a lot too.

When I am working, my husband, a house husband come musician, does the schooling with the children. At first he was very reluctant, but when the children started asking him many questions, he realized anybody could be a teacher. Nowadays, he is heavily into *kanji*, Japanese history and music, but this varies depending on the children's interests.

Alternative schools are few and far between in Japan, but they do exist and their numbers are increasing. For the past 2 years our children have attended Planet School, or Wakusei Gakkou, part time. It is a "free school", or a school following the philosophy of Neil Young. It caters for elementary as well as junior high school students. Our children attend mainly when they go to the Iwakura farm house to play, build things (e.g. kites), check their organic garden and bring home the harvest, catch beetles, snakes and salamanders, go fishing, light a fire, do pottery, cook lunch, and basically are free to choose what they want to do.

Being bilingual, I think, should not be pushed but be part of a natural process. When I was teaching at Kyoto International School ten years ago, there were many bilingual or trilingual children. Interestingly enough, many of these children were considered "behind" in their English skills. But when they became teenagers, they thrived in both languages and are now all studying in English or Japanese speaking universities. One student, whose parents are from an English speaking country and are both bilingual, refused to speak any Japanese. But now, ten years later and living in another country, he is apparently obsessed with Japanese. Another student, who seemed to make no progress with his English all the time at KIS, is now studying at a British university. My aim is for them to have a happy childhood and to be normal children. For this, they need a well-rounded, holistic education so they can develop their full potential and choose their own future whether it be as a farmer, cook, builder, dancer, or teacher.

As parents, let's enjoy our children. Children can learn a lot from us but we can also learn a lot from them. We should remember that each child is different, that we are individuals; thus, we should not compare our children with their siblings or with their friends. I think as parents the most important thing is to spend time with our children, especially at a young age, because we are their first teachers and their most important role models. Not all learning has a direct response. Some is indirect and metamorphosed within and it may take a long time for a response, maybe a week, maybe a year, ten or thirty years until it is internalized. If your children go to a Japanese school or an International School or you are home schooling, if they are bilingual or not, really are not the most important things. As long as they are happy, enjoying their childhood and thriving in the situation you have made for them, we are building their foundation. They will do the rest on their own, and do it very well, I'm sure!

Names of some of the alternative schools in Japan:

Internet High School Kaze, Yokohama. T: 045-633-3792 or 3729

Kinokuni Kodomo no Mura Gakuen, Wakayama. T: 0736-33-3370 "free school"

Rami Junior High School, Kobe. T: 078-671-7625 "free school"

Sunrise Playschool, Bilingual, Yamashina, Kyoto. T/FAX: 075-501-8566

Tokyo Schule, Tokyo. T: 0422-41-0506 "Steiner"

Tokyo Shure, Tokyo. T: 03-5993-3135 "free school"

Wakusei Gakkou (Planet School), Kyoto. T/FAX : 075-722-4679 "free school"

Address of a correspondence course (Steiner based)

Oak Meadow School, Post Office Box 740, Putney, VT 05346 U.S.A.

T/FAX: (+1) 802-387-5108

When School Does Not Work Out For The Kid: Educational Alternatives In Japan

Beatrix Yoshikawa©

TV personality and celebrity Tetsuko Kuroyanagi's mother, Cho Kuroyanagi, writes in her autobiography "Chotchan" about her daughter starting school: "Tetsuko was full of excitement about this new world called school and she went off very cheerfully. However, at school they had things called rules which everyone is supposed to obey. These rules did not suit her devil-may-care personality at all...."

Tetsuko didn't fit. She was a problem child in public school. Cho went ahead and looked around for a different place until she found "Tomoe Gakuen", a private school later described in Tetsuko's famous book "Totto-chan". That school would have an immense influence on her life. This was more than fifty years ago.

Things don't always turn out that smoothly. And problems are not always that visible from the first day of school. But parents can learn a lesson from Cho: the need for rapid communication with the school if a problem turns up, and the courage and determination to go ahead with a new choice for the child if it seems necessary. The choice can mean taking a child out of mainstream school and looking for an alternative elsewhere. On the other hand, it can also mean fighting for a place in mainstream school for a kid whom society automatically places in a special school. Perhaps the guideline for a parent's decision is best expressed in Hirotada Ototake's recent autobiography *Gotai Fumanzoku* (in the English translation "No one's perfect") where he says "...the important thing to consider is what each individual child really needs."

During the last ten years, Japan has seen a tremendous increase of children and youths who for various reasons drop out of school (*chuto taigaku*), refuse to go back to school (*toko-kyohi*) and as a result either hang around in the streets or hardly ever leave their home (*hiki-komori*). Until 1997 the Japanese Ministry of Education used the term *gakko girai* (dislike of school) to describe the phenomenon. Later, the term was considered inappropriate and the more neutral term *futoko* (not going to school) was adopted for children who for some reason stopped going to school (*futoko-ji*). 1999 statistics of the Japanese Ministry of Education count more than 128,000 elementary and junior high school students who at that time didn't go to school for at least 3 months in a row. (This number doesn't include students who miss most lessons but occasionally show up at school). The number of such students has been on the rise since. While in the past, most youths gave serious reasons such as bullying for not wanting to go to school, there is a tendency in recent years for kids to answer "*nantonaku*" ("there is no one specific reason") when they are asked why they refuse to go to school. The media call such kids *nantonaku futoko-ji* (children who don't give a specific reason for not going to school).

Japanese public school responded to a situation of increased bullying and malaise in the public school system with the introduction of an education reform that will be fully implemented in most schools by the year 2002. An essential part of the reform is the fact that the former curriculum has been shortened to the benefit of more classes based on *ikita benkyo* (studies that provide first hand experiences out in the real world to the children). A fresh breeze can be felt in the public school system.

On the other hand, the alternatively minded community in Japan has started to meet the

lingering educational crisis situation in the country much earlier. During the last ten years an amazing variety of free schools and support centers aiming to give youths a second chance have sprung up. While some are schools with a full educational curriculum that take a liberal and individual approach, others provide a place to go for youths who are not ready yet to go back to any school. Many of such schools and centers have been founded on private initiative and while some of them are business minded, many are not. They often have high ideals and while struggling financially, try to keep the tuition affordable for parents by relying on support by sponsors and fan-clubs. Educational programs are often combined with programs in the outdoors, handicraft workshops, help in and around the center and experiences on the workplace. Priority in many of these places is to foster and strengthen energy and self confidence in the youths, so that they can take their lives into their own hands in a responsible way.

The three examples below give a glimpse of the kind of alternatives available. At the end of this article there are some addresses, web pages and other resources where information on such schools and centers can be found.

1. Self Support Center TOUJU, Kyoto

This center is sponsored by Kyoto's Chion-in temple, Kyoto City, as well as several private sponsors. It is not a school but a place to "start anew". Its purpose is to help youths (usually from 15 years up) who are having trouble with establishing themselves in or at school or work to gain their social independence (start school or working) while providing them with a place to live. It offers day therapy (a place to go, to talk, to use the internet, etc.) for youths who live outside the center, and counseling for parents of youths who stay shut up indoors, don't go to school or work and are unable/unwilling to come to day therapy. The center is open for youths from anywhere in Japan. Full board (males only) is 30,000 yen/month, youths day therapy 1,000 yen, counseling for family members 1,000 yen per session (fees as of spring 2001). Telephone counseling (only Japanese) about problems such as child raising, non-attendance of school, shutting oneself indoors, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, job searching etc. is free (9am-6pm).

Personal note: Mr. Ryuo and Mrs. Tsuda, the main counselors at the center, are very cordial and dedicated. Mrs. Tsuda is not only a counselor but also an excellent cook. Her homemade *obento* that the youths take to work daily are famous, and so is her skill at integrating "cooking therapy" into day therapy. TOUJU is located in a well kept house in the center of Kyoto, near Chion-in temple. Full board youths get individual rooms with bed, desk, cupboards etc. Clean and friendly.

Contact: Self Support Center Touju, Rinka-cho 400-3, Higashiyama-ku, 605-0062 Kyoto

T/FAX: 075-551-5656 touju@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp <http://web.kyoto-inet.or.jp/people/touju/>

2. Yonaguni Island DONAN CHIKYU YUJIN "free school"

Mr. Nomura's "free school" is located on a tiny island in the far Southwest of Okinawa. It is a private undertaking, supported by many individuals. The purpose of the center is to make available a place to live (and to regain the strength to live) for young people who have dropped out of school, have

serious problems with their parents or need a break from their way of life for some other reason. Youths (girls and boys from upper elementary to early twenties) can live in the center where everything functions as in a big family. The length of stay can vary from a few weeks to several years. The youths can help on the horse farm, in the yard and in the natural food restaurant run by the center. The ocean is right nearby and staff take some of the younger children to swim, play and learn to dive. Older children are encouraged to take their diving license. Local divers, fishermen and *shamisen* players, to name only a few, cooperate with the center to get the youths into contact with nature and with the local residents and to teach them skills. Children who are ready to go to school can commute to the local elementary school or junior high. For older kids, local jobs provide an opportunity to start earning their own money. Call Donan Chikyu Yujin (Japanese only) and discuss all details with Mr. Nomura. There is a monthly fee for staying in the family which can be discussed if there are financial difficulties.

Contact: Mr. Hirobumi Nomura, Donan Chikyu Yujin, Yonaguni 387, Yonaguni-cho, Yaeyama-gun, 907-1801 Okinawa-ken T/FAX: 09808 7 3779 Mobile phone: 090 1919 1113. The newsletter "*chima-dayori*" appears six times a year. Apply by sending a fax and paying 1,000 yen (yearly) into postal account No. 01740 9 28582 "Donan Chikyu Yujin".

3. High School TSUGENO (*Tsugeno Koto Gakko*)

Tsugeno high school in Aichi prefecture is a boarding school for girls and boys opened in 1995 with the aim to give kids who dropped out of school during junior high a second chance. As of April 2000, 378 students were enrolled. The school is financially supported by Aichi prefecture which keeps tuition at a comparatively low level. It welcomes kids who have missed part or all of junior high (*futoko-ji*) but wish to reenter school and make a new start at high school age. Children who have never been *futoko-ji* but who feel attracted by the liberal, individual approach of the school are welcome too. All students live in the dormitory (*zenryosei*). The school has a full educational curriculum including a wide range of subjects and club activities. Students are encouraged to start at their own level (*gakuryoku ni awaseta kyoiku*) and make progress at their own pace (*shindo-betsu ni*). Extra-curricular activities (experience on the workplace, help in the local community, lectures by famous personalities) are an important part of the program. There are no particular rules on dressing code, hairstyle or personal accessories. The school aims at "accepting the students into the school as they are and guide them from there".

Tsugeno High School: T: 05363-4-0330 FAX: 05363-4-0331

Homepage: <http://www.tsugeno.ac.jp/> Email: mail@tsugeno.ac.jp/

General Resources on Free Schools and Home Schooling in Japanese:

Although this information is in Japanese, it is worth the effort of checking. Some of these schools could be the right place for a child who has grown up in Japan and who is unhappy in mainstream school.

Japan Free School Association (JFSA)

(Nihon Free School Kyokai)

Information on alternative schools in Japan, in Japanese.

T: 03-5351-3739 FAX: 03-3409-2390

<http://www.sphere.ad.jp/shin-kai/jfsa.html>

TOKYO HOME SHURE

Offers advice, courses, Internet courses, activities and much more for kids and parents who look for alternative education and home schooling in Japan.

T: 03-5363-7371 FAX: 03-5363-7372 <http://www.shure.or.jp>

Futoko Joho Center

Information center for children who refuse to go to school and for their parents: events, study programs, encouragement, Internet self help groups etc. In Japanese.

T: 03-3940-6593 FAX: 03-3940-1699

Futoko-Shinbun

Newspaper in Japanese with focus on issues of school refusal. T: 03-5360-1231

Book (in Japanese)

1998. The Guide to The Other School: *Mo Hitotsu no Gakko Annai* . Nijuisseiki Kyoiku Kenkyujo & Shufunotomo Co.Ltd. ISBN 4-07-223361-7

(Comprehensive regularly updated guide in Japanese to Japanese alternative and free schools.)

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Expanding Educational Options Through The Internet

Andrea Carlson and Reiko Furuya

Introduction

For bilingual children, literacy in both languages is important to developing a deep, rich understanding of their languages and cultures, and plays an important role in giving them choices in developing their cultural identity and academic options.

However, the issue of isolation for many bilingual children can be an acute one in terms of maintaining their other language. Particularly in developing literacy in the minority language, motivating children to read and write without a community of peers to provide collaboration and incentive can prove difficult, as can making available the kinds of resources and opportunities that are easily accessible for developing the community language.

In the past this has been almost insurmountable. However with the advent of the Internet,

multilingual learners today may have a potential ally in bringing the world into the home or classroom. "With the proliferation of FL websites on the Internet, language learners can readily find a plethora of reading materials to help them improve their literacy skills." (LeLoup and Pontereo, 2000). Other websites, such as online newspapers or sites based on science or history topics, may also be valuable resources for developing literacy.

The learner's realm can apparently be similarly extended by various types of Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC), such as by exchanging email with keypals in other countries and participating in discussion lists on a variety of topics (Robb, 1996), as well as through collaborative writing activities (Vilmi, 1998) and bilingual web projects (Cummins and Slayer, 1996). Because it involves human-to-human contact, this type of computer use is thought by many to be a revolutionary development in computer assisted language learning (Cummins and Sayer, 1996).

In addition to helping learners to develop language skills, computers are purported to be instrumental in increasing learners' motivation (Warschauer, 1996), an issue relevant to bilingualism and biliteracy. The theme of motivation and bilingualism is significant because it relates to the question of why people become bilingual, stay bilingual or lose their bilingual ability (Baker, 1988). The related theme of attitude is also important, both as something an individual has which causes certain behaviours and as an outcome variable. Baker (1988) writes, "Attitude conceived as an outcome of education is important because it may provide a complimentary or even an alternative and more long lasting effect than examination achievement." Attitude to a taught second language may not only last longer, it may also motivate learners to use other opportunities and resources to develop their language skills.

It is, however, important to consider the place of technology in education. In discussing the need for computers to add to the value of language learning, Bax (2000) writes that computers in education do not necessarily create easy solutions:

The prevalent assumption appears to be that as technology can solve the problem of entertainment or communication, then it must surely be able to solve the problem of education equally easily. It is seen, in short, as some sort of panacea which will make education quicker, easier and cheaper.

Cummins and Sayers (1996) in describing this problem, concur that, "The solution is seen not just in the diffusion of technology in the schools, but rather through creating new models of interactive, autonomous, student-centered learning which allow students to use technology in a process of critical collaborative inquiry."

The purpose of this article is to consider how parents and teachers of primary school-age children might use online resources to help children develop literacy in Japanese and English. We will first outline some of the various types of resources available online and look at possible problems associated with using online materials, and suggest ways they might be avoided. We will then discuss our experience using computers to develop literacy with a topic-based project. Finally, we will describe our plans for an online project, the Bilingual Kids Web Club, in which children (and their parents) will collaborate to create an online bilingual newspaper.

Online Resources

Our interest in using the Internet for language learning started as CALL teachers in Japanese

universities, and has extended to our exploring how we might use it to help bilingual children. We both have, as luck would have it, primary school-age children of the same ages (ten year old boys and six year old girls). Reiko Furuya's children attend an International school in Japan, but will eventually move to the Japanese school system. Andrea Carlson's family moved from Japan, and Japanese schools, to Britain two years ago, but will return to Japan at some point in the future. While we are very appreciative of the multicultural experiences our children are currently having, we share the common challenge of needing to help our children keep up in their present school situations *and* catch up in the other system.

Like many other parents and teachers, we have spent hours exploring cyberspace, searching for those (elusive) websites that will help our children on their way to biliteracy. What we have found, not surprisingly, is something of a garden – lush, fertile and well maintained in some spots, weedy in others, and at times an overgrown jungle. We will discuss how to get the most from this garden later in this paper, following a description of some of the 'flowers' we have discovered. Were we to divide this online garden into sections, it might be helpful to think of it in terms of the following:

1. Websites that provide resources for parents or teachers. This might include materials that are otherwise expensive, difficult to find, or that are needed right away;
2. Websites that have resources which children can access, with or without adult help. These might include, among others, online stories, science-related topics, and bulletin boards where children can post questions or messages;
3. CMC projects, which might use websites, email, teleconferencing, or any combination of the three. CMC projects can be organized so that children communicate individually or as members of a class.

We have used these three categories to organize a detailed list of websites, available at www.bilingualkids.net/links.htm. Here, in the interest of space, we will describe a sampling of sites that are representative of the types of resources that are available on the Internet for developing literacy in English and Japanese.

A site that could be useful to both children and adults, particularly those grown-ups who are not completely biliterate, is **Rikai.com** <http://www.rikai.com>, a multilingual translator for English, Japanese, and Spanish. Moving the mouse over words on a web page produces real-time translation into (depending on the direction) kanji, hiragana, or English. It also has a function for keeping a word list and for playing a kanji card game. Another site, レジブルNC (Legible NC) www.nicer.go.jp/legible/ (Japanese) enables visitors to Japanese language web sites to change kanji to kana.

Of those sites that are geared mostly for parents and teachers, there are many providing resources about using technology in learning. **Keiko Schneider's Bookmarks** <http://www.sabotenweb.com/bookmarks/> (English) is a remarkable guide to technology in Japanese language teaching, and to finding what is available on the Internet. The **Computer and Education Connections** <http://www.nvo.com/ecnewsletter/> (English) is another excellent site, with links to everything from Internet Adventure Projects to Bilingual Resources. Useful information on how to use technology in teaching without having to actually know much about technology can be found at the **The Tech-Connected Teacher** <http://www.sndlc.org/tools/index.htm> (English).

Two search engines for children deserve mention. **Kids Goo** <http://kids.goo.ne.jp/> (Japanese) enables sites linked to Kids Goo to have hiragana translations for kanji. In addition, there is a function that allows visitors to a given site to choose the level of the kanji they need hiragana support for. **Yahooligans** <http://www.yahooligans.com> (English) has information and resources about just about everything.

Content rich sites, some with audio, video, threaded discussion, ask the expert, and online quizzes, are also becoming more and more abundant on the Web. An example of an excellent site is **みんなの理科教室** (A Science Room for Everyone) <http://133.96.51.58/rika.htm> (Japanese), where topics are interesting and change every week, and most kanji have hiragana translations. In addition, the site's creators respond to children's questions and postings on the bulletin board in a thoughtful and warm manner. Another good Japanese site is **なるほどの森** (Home Science Experiments) <http://member.nifty.ne.jp/kume/indexj.html> (Japanese and some English and French), with instructions for things children can try making at home, such as *slime* or boomerangs. The English is understandable, but a bit awkward in some places. An English-language site, **Brainpop** www.brainpop.com (English) has short quizzes and interesting animated movies on a wide variety of science-related topics. Another site with information on a wide variety of science topics is **Learning Networks Fact Monster** <http://www.factmonster.com/> (English).

The Internet also has a wealth of reading materials. The **UNICEF Voices of Youth** site <http://www.unicef.org/voy/> (English, French, Spanish) has readings on global issues, and a threaded discussion board where children can post their opinions and questions. A smaller, but extremely interesting and timely site, **Tolerance.org** <http://www.tolerance.org/pt/index.html> (English) has stories and activities aimed at fighting hate and promoting tolerance. **怪談奇談恐怖の百物語** (Mysterious and Strange Stories) <http://kids.goo.ne.jp/cgi-bin/kgframe.cgi?BL=0&SY=0&MD=2&TP=> <http://www5.ocn.ne.jp/~kaidan> (Japanese) has spooky stories, but not all have Kids Goo's hiragana translations. Slightly less spooky, but also intriguing is **Mystery Net's Kids Mysteries** <http://kids.mysterynet.com/> (English) with mysteries, magic tricks, and mysteries by children. More suitable reading before bedtime can be found at **Whootie Owl's Fairytales** <http://hazel.forest.net/whootie/default.html> (English), which has fairytales from around world, nice illustrations and, as each story is on one page, is easy to print. **Japanese Folk Tales** <http://mhtml.ulis.ac.jp/~myriam/Haikei.html> (Japanese, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, and German) is a useful resource in that the stories are in more than one language. For beginning readers of Japanese, **BOTさんのおはなし** (Stories About Bot-San) <http://botsan.com/botsan.htm> (Japanese) has charming stories with small illustrations woven through the text. Another enjoyable site for younger children is **Early Birds Music** <http://www.earlybirdsmusic.com/songs.html> (English). Songs are accompanied by demonstrations of the accompanying gestures and by 'non-streaming' audio, so the sound quality is excellent. Interesting for children of all ages are the fun puzzles at **Quiz Box Japan Puzzles** <http://www.jp.quizbox.com/puzzles/> (Japanese) and at **Quiz Box Puzzles** <http://quizbox.com/puzzles/> (English). **Enchanted Learning**

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/Home.html> (Multilingual, but no Japanese) has a wonderful picture dictionary.

Sites aimed specifically at developing language skills are also abundant for both languages. In one, [いちねんせいかんじパズル](http://www.alles.or.jp/~yukiyasu/kan00.html) (Kanji Puzzles for First Graders)

<http://www.alles.or.jp/~yukiyasu/kan00.html> (Japanese), children drag the parts of a kanji into the correct position, and then check their answers. [学習アニメの館](http://www.sabah.edu.my/meiko/) (Animated Learning Center)

<http://www.sabah.edu.my/meiko/> (Japanese) is a brilliant site for learning hiragana and the kanji learned in grades one to three in primary school. Clicking on a character causes an animation to appear describing the kanji. [漢字教室](http://www.oct-net.ne.jp/~mkk/) (Kanji Class)

<http://www.oct-net.ne.jp/~mkk/> (Japanese) is a useful site, with games for remembering kanji and information on stroke order. Kanji are divided by primary school grade levels. An amazing site for older children or adults is the **The Kanji Site**

<http://www.kanjisite.com/kfs4khtml> (Japanese and English) On the left screen is a kanji, which becomes romajii as the mouse is moved over it, then click on a kanji to see Japanese and English explanations on the right screen. For developing English reading and writing skills, for younger learners **abcteach**

<http://www.abcteach.com> (English) has printable projects, and especially nice theme units. A similar site, **Mrs. ABC** <http://www.mrsabc.com/index.shtml> (English) also has useful materials for younger children. There is a small charge to join this program, but many of its resources are free of charge.

Reading Comprehension Connection <http://www.readingcomprehensionconnection.com/> (English) has interactive quizzes for older children Also for slightly older children, **Education Place Wacky Web**

Tales and Brain Teasers <http://www.eduplace.com/tales/> (English) lets children create their own funny *web tales* as a way to teach the parts of speech. At **Paragraph Punch** <http://www.paragraphpunch.com/>

(English) and **Essay Punch** <http://www.essaypunch.com/> (English) children are taken through the actual steps involved in writing paragraphs and essays. A unique site, **Poetry - a click and drag diversion**

<http://prominence.com/java/poetry/> (English) lets visitors to the site drag words on a blackboard to create poems.

Websites related to CMC Projects include **CIESE Online Classroom Projects**

<http://k12science.stevens-tech.edu/collabprojs.html> (English), which has science-related collaborative projects, such as the *Square of Life* project in which children in different parts of the world gather and exchange information on one square meter of land in their neighbourhood. **Houghton Mifflin's**

Education Place <http://www.eduplace.com/projects/> (English) has current information on a wide variety of online projects, and a section for keypals and correspondents exchange. Information on key pals can also be found at **Kidlink** <http://www.kidlink.org/english/index.html> (English) and **Teaching.com's Key**

Pals Club <http://www.teaching.com/KeyPals/> (English). For those with a web cam, a place to learn about videoconferencing is at **Navigate Your Way Around NetMeeting**

<http://netconference.about.com/library/weekly/aa081699.htm>, which uses screen shots to explain how to set up and use NetMeeting, free videoconferencing software from Microsoft. Our only complaint is that it does not tell the reader that by contacting another computer's IP Address directly (the IP Address for a computer is found in NetMeeting Help menu About NetMeeting) one can avoid being listed in the NetMeeting Directory. This seems especially important for children.

Potential Problems and Possible Solutions

As with any medium challenges exist, one being that literacy development in a child's other language may well come at the end of a busy school day or on the weekend, often with an (emotionally-involved) parent as tutor/teacher. What are needed are materials and activities that are, in varying degrees, interesting, intriguing, informative or interactive and which live on well-organized websites. Returning to the garden analogy, adult help is needed to help children avoid getting caught up in the weeds, such as sites that are slow, confusing or have dead links, all of which may cause frustration and dampen motivation. This entails an adult knowing the general lay of the land, and being close at hand to redirect where needed.

Another consideration is that, for online learning to be truly productive, the computer needs to be integrated into the family learning environment and not treated as a one-off source of information or entertainment. This may require some forethought and preparation, such as making a habit of printing materials and keeping them in a notebook for future review, and having the notebook divided into sections for easy reference. Where the computer is situated is also important. There should be space around the computer for the children to write, and perhaps even space nearby to keep their notebook and other materials.

While content-rich sites are abundant, without real reasons to write (and read), it can be difficult to motivate children to take advantage of all that the Internet has to offer. Perhaps an ideal situation is where content and communication are combined, such as at UNICEF's Voices of Youth site, where children can read on a topic and then post their opinion, or the A Science Room for Everyone site where the site's creators respond to postings individually. Online collaborative projects and email exchanges may also give children real reasons to communicate, but adult help is necessary to keep the exchange moving forward and to give computer and language support along the way.

Word-processing, especially in *romaji*, is another concern and one possible answer is to have children word-process regularly for short periods, letting their work 'cool off' between sessions. However, while children may find word processing a bit slow going and tedious initially, they very quickly catch on to the wondrous ways using a computer can make their life easier, such as spell-checks and the grammar checking function, and use them to full advantage.

A Short-Lived After-School Program

We have been very impressed by the influence that being in the company of peers has had on our children's desire to learn, or not learn, to read and write in their other language. For example, Andrea Carlson's son Kaita had little interest in reading and especially writing in English as an *ichinensei* (first grader) in Japan, and nightly English sessions were an ongoing struggle. However, one day in his new school in Britain completely changed his outlook and he quickly became in equal measures very enthusiastic about learning English and very unenthusiastic about Japanese, particularly writing.

We started wondering if children might be more motivated to read and write in the language they are not being schooled in if they have a community of online peers to interact with and interesting reasons to interact. Initially, we thought that perhaps having an online after school program to develop biliteracy might be a viable approach, and to learn more about this we decided to first pilot some

materials with our two sons. The children chose Space as a topic and we prepared some materials/activities around that topic. They seemed to find the work useful and interesting, so we went on to another topic, Dinosaurs, this time getting a bit more serious and putting assignments up on a website. We quickly discovered that:

1. The children liked the topic and the readings, but after the novelty wore off they found it all too much like school, and that at the end of a busy day they did not want more school-type work;
2. Although they have similar educational backgrounds, their learning needs are quite different (one finds English harder and Japanese easier and the other is the opposite);
3. They were *very* interested in *planning* the website;
4. They were both frustrated and fascinated by using the computer, and having templates for some of the activities helped them;
5. They liked the idea of having friends in cyberspace;
6. They also liked the idea having their work posted on the website for the world to see.

We decided a different approach was needed.

The Bilingual Kids Web Club

We then started thinking that working with children to create an online bilingual newspaper might be something to explore, and have set up a general framework for an online program (the Bilingual Kids Web Club <http://www.bilingualkids.net>) for ten children living in four countries. We are planning that children (and parents) will work together to make a monthly web-based newspaper, which might include places for the children to:

- Describe aspects of life where they live, such as school, holidays or family life;
- Write stories, poetry, and short research reports;
- Read on a topic and discuss it on a bulletin board;
- Display projects they have made for school;
- Put their puzzles, jokes, cartoons, etc.
- Meet via videoconferencing to read and talk about what they have read.

This project is scheduled to begin in Autumn 2001, and we will be reporting our observations in future papers. What we can mention at this point is an email diary exchange three of the children participated in over the summer holiday.

In July of this year we were fortunate to join forces with Amanda Taura, a very enthusiastic and capable parent of two bilingual children. We conferred with the children and decided that they would keep a bilingual diary, and that they would send it to the others every Tuesday. We agreed not to decide in advance how much writing would be done in either language, so long as some writing was done in both languages. Messages were sometimes composed directly on the computer, and sometimes on paper.

With support from their parents, the children settled quite quickly into a pattern of writing about amusing things (such as *Ten things you can do to bug your parents...*) in English and the doing the diary entries in Japanese. They ended each message with questions for the group and for the individuals, which were then answered by return email or in the following week's message. Photographs of the children (and their friends, pets, etc.) were also sent by email, which most likely helped to give the children a better

sense of who they were corresponding with.

The children appeared genuinely interested in reading the messages from the others, and seemed to develop a natural rapport. In addition, writing to a real audience provided a natural opportunity for parents to focus on language points, such as word order, spelling and punctuation – as well as helping the children to make their writing interesting and polite. Parents helped with word-processing in varying degrees, depending on the length of the writing and the emotional state of the child, but the majority was done by the children. Overall, around 65% of the writing was in English, perhaps partly because of the initial difficulty in using *romajii* to word-process. It will be interesting to see if this pattern changes as the children become more adept at Japanese keyboarding.

We had intended to end this project at the end of the school holidays, but as the children report that they are enjoying the exchanges and the parents also feel it to be of value, we plan to continue and perhaps merge what we have been doing with the forthcoming Bilingual Kids Web Club program. And, while it still far too early to comment on whether the exchanges have had any impact on both developing the children's reading and writing skills or their motivation, the project has certainly provided us with a sense that online learning groups for developing biliteracy is an area worth investigating.

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An Educational Adventure In An American School

Judy Tabohashi

(Adapted from an article which appeared in *BJ* Vol.9, No. 2 April/May 2000)

I am American and my husband Yoshiki was born and raised in Kyoto. We have always spoken English to each other. Yoshiki's level is not fluent, but adequate for daily conversation. We have three sons and their ages and their grades in Japanese school at the time of this experience were: Tomoyoshi 10;4 (4th grade); Mitsuki 8;10 (3rd grade); and Masaki 7;1 (1st grade).

When our first child was born, I was most concerned about Tomoyoshi learning proper Japanese and being able to communicate in his community. Japanese is very important for the boys to be successful and accepted in their community. I knew that English would always be my responsibility and through the use of books and reading aloud, I felt with this exposure their English would improve and become stronger. Our family has, in the last four years, invested in two computers that have enabled the boys to "play" in English while increasing their reading proficiency.

How it all started

The beginning of this tale goes back to our summer visit with friends three years earlier. Their daughter was to begin school in the American system and we were able to join them for the summer visitation program for children entering the school. There were no thoughts of studying in America yet. However, the boys were very curious to look and learn about the school.

In early March 1999, our eldest son came to me and asked, 'Mom, could we really try school in the States?' I was surprised, but at the same time very pleased. On talking it over with my elder brother and asking his advice, he and his wife offered to share in this adventure. The principal of the school in his area said that she would gladly accept our sons. However, her only concern was language. My brother assured her that they were quite capable in English and that only in a stressful situation, would Japanese come out first, but given a moment or two, they would be able to communicate. So my four men began an adventure that has changed ALL of our lives forever.

Our goals and hopes

Our focus was to be on cultural awareness and understanding in English including:

1. American customs and ways of life;
2. oral and written English language usage;
3. person-to-person relationship building.

Time-wise, the choice was perfect. In American schools the year begins in early September, so everyone is a new kid in class. The autumn months are historically an important part of American history with special holidays and cultural activities to celebrate both at home and school. Leaving Japan during autumn with the many sports days and practices meant they did not miss as much as they might in the first or third terms, and returning in December, they would still be in the same class.

The application process

We advised the boys' teachers in Japan of our decision at the beginning of the first term during their visit to our home. This open and direct communication in the beginning was important as it made the

teachers aware of our hopes and it was at this point that we all made a commitment to the plan and the boys became very excited. We live in a very traditional area, with a conservative school not usually open to new ideas, so we were elated when our new principal was very supportive. One point that helped a great deal was the fact that we have been active in our sons' education and my husband was the PTA president for our local public kindergarten. This position has close ties with the public city elementary schools, which led our new principal to know that my husband regards education highly.

Application for the American school involved filling out comprehensive forms, confirming and carrying out the vaccination requirements as they vary from state to state, then having the boys' records documented. The Japanese mother/child notebook (*boshitecho*) was helpful, but a translation was necessary and, fortunately, our pediatrician trained in the States and was able assist us.

In the US

On arrival in Washington, my sons were invited to the school on September 1st for a Welcome meeting & Ice Cream Social for Students, Parents and Teachers. The idea behind the gathering was to make the initial entry into the school very warm and friendly for new and transferring students. After ice creams, they toured the school, located their classrooms, and met their teachers for the first time prior to their first day of school. They even got to choose their seats in class! Our middle son demonstrated his independent spirit and chose the seat farthest from the teacher. Our youngest son was more interested in coming home to Japan. Our eldest son was enjoying every minute of the ice cream. In each case, the teachers were friendly and welcoming, and realizing that the boys had grown up in a different culture, they made steps to help the boys feel at home. Only my eldest son's teacher was not able to attend that night. After this event the boys were even more excited to attend school - Day 1 - September 8.

At dinner, September 7, everyone was talking about school and all that would be happening in the next few days, when all of the sudden, our youngest blurted out, '*Nihon ni kaero!!!*', to which his Uncle Tom (not understanding the Japanese, but recognizing the emotions behind the words) said, 'Yes Masaki, in three months you will be going home to Japan, but tomorrow you will be going to school here.' Masaki just let out a heavy sigh and said, 'OK'. The two older boys were much more verbally ready for school, whereas Masaki has been much more passive in English. He spoke only when no one could understand his Japanese in a hesitant fashion.

The first day

On the first morning, the boys were up early with their bags and supplies, ready to go. My brother's home is less than two blocks to the school. My husband walked the boys to school, where they each found their classrooms and the day began. Each day brought easy acceptance and friendships with their classmates. The boys had school homework each day and we also chose to subscribe to a Japanese home study program to help them keep up with their Japanese subjects including math and Japanese (*kokugo*). Even with the homework from these two worlds, they still had lots of time to play and enjoy life there.

In each of the classrooms, there were computer stations for the children to use for reading practice and spelling activities. The children took reading comprehension tests on the computer allowing the teacher to evaluate their reading level on a daily basis. Our eldest has always been a reader, and my

biggest joy was the phone conversation where he read his first long book by himself and it wasn't too difficult. I was so happy for him, and wanted to be there with him at that moment. The wonderful thing was that I did keep in contact with the boys' teachers through e-mail and was advised of the boys' progress.

Advantages

One positive factor of their stay from the boys' viewpoint was that they did not stand out and were accepted and liked for who they were. In America, before returning, our middle son, spoke up for the first time ever about being called names in Japan. When I asked him why he had never mentioned it, he said 'Not much anyone could do about it!' However, in the States, he said 'No one ever calls me a name! Even when they are not happy with me, they don't do that.' He has had the most difficulty dealing with coming back to Japan. He adjusted extremely well and I foresee that in the future that he will probably go back again. Each of the boys' experiences were mixed with struggles and it was not easy for them in reading or writing, but their teachers worked well with them and allowed them to progress at their own pace. They were not assessed as needing special Second Language classes in school, but then again, I don't think English is their Second Language.

This was definitely 'an adventure that changed ALL our lives forever!' The boys grew visibly in both appearance and self-esteem. They had a new confidence about themselves that they didn't really have when they left Japan. This became apparent when their teachers asked them to speak to their class about their experiences and each of them gave a speech for an hour and a half with confidence, answering questions and showing photos of their time in America. I feel that this new growth was brought about through the daily contact with a new world, a world that was part of them, yet a world that they had never known other than through my eyes. Through this experience, they were received and accepted as American, with ties to Japan that were viewed as positive points.

The downside

While the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages, there was a downside to the experience that we had not expected. For me as the mother living apart from her children for four months, I was not really prepared for the changes that I saw in my sons and in my husband. As we have begun life again together here in Japan, we are continuing to learn how to deal with each other again on a new plateau and determine new boundaries and borders.

My visit to see them

Before the end of their stay, I went to the States to meet with their teachers and spend Thanksgiving with my family. It was a wonderful experience to see the boys in their classes and meet the school staff. It had been nice to hear about each boy via e-mail however now the face-to-face contact was invaluable - seeing in person how the teachers had shaped my children and hearing about the contributions the boys and my husband had made to the school.

Masaki's teacher

The first grade teacher was perfect for Masaki. She is the kind of teacher that can see where a child is successful and works to encourage growth in other areas, by building on those strengths and showing them the way to improve their learning. She watched Masaki's language development with

fascination in a steady day-by-day growth process. She soon learned what would trigger a confrontation between Masaki and another child. She helped him use words to solve his problems instead of his fists, and that was a really big change for him. His writing and reading were at a similar level as most of the others as they were all beginners and he made progress right alongside of each of his friends. His math skills, however, were above and beyond the others because he had been in first grade in Japan since April. This gave him something to be proud and confident of.

Mitsuki and reading

Mitsuki's third grade teacher was a very sensitive man. He saw Mitsuki's wit and quickness for analyzing the situation and encouraged that. Mitsuki is the kind of child that will get away with not doing as much as others, if he can. His teacher found that out quickly too and kept him almost 100% on track. Within the classroom, they were using an Accelerated Reading Program (AR Program) to build comprehension skills. Many noted children's books had been evaluated at a certain reading level and for each book there is a test covering vocabulary and comprehension of the story. These tests are all on the computers and so when a child has finished reading a particular book they take the computer test. By scoring 80% or higher on the test, they receive a star on a wall chart. Each child is given a reading level test at the beginning of the year and then periodically throughout the year to determine their new reading level.

Mitsuki had never been much of a reader in Japan and had just the very basic skills of a first grader. Mitsuki found this program great as he could pit himself against the computer. Each child's goal is set by his level to read a certain number of books during this first term and, as it turned out, Mitsuki surpassed his goal by reading 135% of his goal. He was given an award and received a coupon for a free pizza at a local pizza shop. Through this program, Mitsuki has been turned on to reading, and since returning home, is often found with a book in his hands. He has come to see books as friends and valuable learning tools.

Tomoyoshi and encouragement

Tomoyoshi's fourth grade teacher had spent his fifth and sixth grade years of elementary school in Germany at German public schools. Through his own experience, he could understand Tomo and his struggles. That was an asset, as Tomo is very sensitive, and with this special consideration became more willing to take risks and speak out in new situations. Mr. E. was more relaxed with the students' spelling as long as he could work out the words. His focus was more on getting the children to put things down on paper and then polish them later. He felt that nowadays with computers and spell check, it is better to just write and let the ideas flow and not get caught up on every single error. The students did have spelling and grammar lessons, but creative writing was important too. This teacher's most outstanding point was the extra effort he went to give encouragement. For example, on an assignment with only eight out of twenty questions correct, this teacher would write an 'individual message' to the child and tell them something like 'Hey, you did much better than your last few tests, nice to see how you are improving! Signed Mr. E.' These little strokes of encouragement, when they are sincere, proved to be powerful for our son.

The principal and supporting staff

The Principal is an approachable, yet no-nonsense type of person. She was always available for conferences whenever needed, was known well by the students and knew the students. The School nurses were also sympathetic women whom the boys found very comforting. Masaki was known as a 'frequent flier' to the nurse's office, for he found that they would give him the extra bit of TLC he needed even when there wasn't really a bump or cut at all.

The last plus

The one thing that the boys all mentioned again and again was the ease with which they were able to talk and become friends with people of all ages and grades. The lack of the age barriers, the openness with communication, and the expectation to say what is on your mind, at first was mind boggling after the careful considerations in Japan, but it has become easier for them. Now they have returned, they are needing to 'tone down' a bit at times. Their friends and teachers back here have seen a new person in them, and while they like the change, they can't put their finger on the actual reason for it.

All in all, I would say that this was a grand adventure and one that the boys would like to do again, given the opportunity and the finances to do so. Until that time, I will do my best to keep the memories and the new individuals that they have become alive, and learn to encourage them as they grow. I need to do my best to continue to grow along with them.

Looking at Colleges: Virtual and Real US College Search and Application

Ann B. Cary (mother), **Beth D. Cary** (aunt), and comments *in italics* by **Aya A. Mitani** (12th grader at Osaka International School)

I'm attending an international high school. I've decided I want to study at a US college because I don't want to live in Tokyo, which I would have to do if I studied at an "international" university in Japan.

The process of selecting colleges to apply to should start early, in 9th grade or even before. It requires time thinking, wondering, collecting information, cruising the internet, browsing in college guides and catalogues, talking to family, friends, relatives, *sempai*, and focusing all of this towards a list of around 6 to 7 final choices. One or two reach schools, two to three probable schools, and one or two safe (or insurance) schools. And, most importantly, each of these colleges should be one where the applicant feels quite certain she will be happy. One clear difference between going through this process now and 30 years ago is the speed with which information can be gathered and questions answered as well as the number of times and places tests can be taken in Japan.

For families living in Japan or anywhere outside of the US, any time you are traveling in America and whenever you are near a college campus, do go see the campus and drive around. Even when the child in question might still be rather young and certainly not expressing much interest in college, it's still a good chance to see what a college campus looks like and will provide a basis for talking about colleges later, for comparing schools and stimulating further interest.

It's really important to see the campus, to be on the campus. You can't feel the atmosphere unless you're inside the campus. You can't feel it from the pictures or from stories. You get to see the real size of things and the community around the campus, too.

Students can take the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) in October of the 10th grade or early in the 11th grade. Many colleges send representatives to visit international schools; whether or not one applies to any of the visiting colleges, it is still a good chance to ask questions and find out about colleges. Several times a year, college fairs are sponsored by government related services (U.S. Commercial Service Japan for dates for Study U.S.A. fairs see <http://www.csjapan.doc.gov/> and also Japan-U.S. Educational Commission at <http://www.jusec.org>). Going to these fairs can provide practice in interviewing and in being interviewed and in gathering information. Help in navigating the college search and admission process is also available on-line (see <http://www.nacac.com/online/index.htm>). For those who cannot get to a city center where such fairs are held, you can attend on-line (see <http://www.onlinecollegefair.com/>). Even with all this quickly available information on your computer monitor, it still is helpful to have printed material between two covers so that one can browse and dabble. U.S. News and World Report publishes "America's Best Colleges" and Time/The Princeton Review, "The Best College for You." "The Fiske Guide to Colleges" comes up with the best and most interesting colleges and a list of "best buys." (Also, "Barron's Profile of American Colleges" and "Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges.")

For non-native speakers of English, the TOEFL (see www.toefl.org) can be taken, as many times as one wants or can afford. The SAT (Scholastic Achievement Test) is offered about seven times a year. The SAT I is a reasoning test with verbal and math components, the SAT II tests achievement in subject areas (see www.collegeboard.com). These should be taken in the 11th grade, preferably toward the end of the school year because the student will have studied further in each of the areas for which her aptitude and achievement are being tested. Tests taken in May and June will likely produce better scores than tests taken in January. During 11th grade, the student should think about the type of college or university she wants and start gathering information.

Cruise the internet to find out about all sorts of colleges: choice of geographical area, size of institution, private or public, co-ed or not, percentage of international students, etc. Be a picky customer – if the college has even one major aspect you don't like, don't consider it. And, try not to have your parents decide for you.

If at all possible visit colleges no later than in the summer after 11th grade. Information about campus tours (guided by current students, or self-guided) is easily found at each college's web-site and appointments for interviews can also be arranged on-line. If you plan to schedule an interview, do start early inquiring about possible dates and times and be sure your travel plans can be coordinated with those dates. Although we found that so many arrangements can be made on-line, in the end we still had to telephone to finalize the time between one afternoon and the next morning. [We then received a confirmation post card, but it arrived as posted mail after the student had already left Japan.] If you cannot arrange to go with your child, or have someone you know go with her, there is a service called College Visits (see <http://www.college-visits.com>) which organizes tours to colleges, including meetings

with admission representatives, lodging, meals, and transportation.

Plan a reasonable pace for a tour of colleges both in terms of distances between colleges and the time at each campus: a minimum of half a day including the guided tour and information session – and some include lunch at a student dining hall. Allow plenty of time to follow directions to the college (most colleges give directions on their web sites), to park in designated areas, and to check in at the admissions office. Be sure to take notes to later refresh one's memory, which can merge or fade after visiting several institutions. Be alert to the character of the campus and the town, and ask the student guides questions about college life. After the colleges tour, it might be a good idea to summarize the pluses and minuses of each college for use in deciding where to make the final applications. Many colleges have "early action" or "early decision" options. If one college stands out in particular, applying on this basis may be a good choice. Such application deadlines are usually before November 1st.

The interview is more for the college's benefit. They get to see you as a possible prospective student if you apply. It was scary to be interviewed because what you say will be considered as material for consideration in your application, if you apply. For me the student, the tour and information session were more valuable than the interview.

Having gone through these preliminary steps, the student is well prepared to start the process of filling in the college applications. By early in the 12th grade, the student should finalize the list of colleges she wants to apply to, get applications (many are available on-line), request reference or recommendation letters from faculty and other adults, work on the application essays, direct required scores to pertinent colleges and keep a record of everything sent. Time should be allowed to ponder, write and rewrite essays and other items required on the applications. Teachers or other adults writing the reference letters should know that their recommendation letters are most effective when they are specific to the student and her activities or abilities, rather than giving generic approval or praise. If the application is done in the normal cycle, the deadlines are usually in December or January. But wouldn't it be a good idea to have everything done before winter vacation! A long waiting period follows until late March to find out about acceptances. Patience is the key during this time.

I'm glad I went to the campuses and read about them so that I could decide on which colleges I really would like to apply to. It will be hard work to fill out the applications, but I'm looking forward to finishing them and sending them off.

[A word of thanks to OIS's counseling center for their presentations, hand-outs and guidance.]

