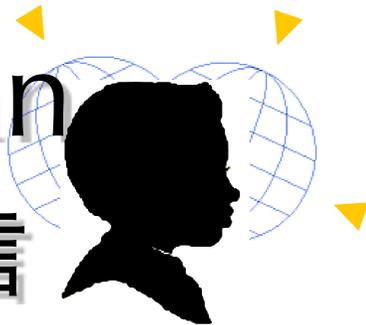


# Bilingual Japan

# バイリンガル通信



Summer 2018 • Volume 27, Number 2

The Newsletter of the JALT  
Special Interest Group on Bilingualism

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## Contribute to *Bilingual Japan*

*Bilingual Japan* is the official newsletter of the Bilingualism Special Interest Group (B-SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). The purpose of this publication is to provide B-SIG members with articles and reports about bilingualism research and bilingual child-raising in Japan. *Bilingual Japan* also provides information about recent B-SIG activities.

**The content of this newsletter depends on contributions from its readers.** All SIG members and other interested parties are invited to submit articles or reports for inclusion in these pages. Start by writing about your family's experience or something about bilingual parenting that concerns you. Even if you feel that what you have to say is trivial, there is always someone who will be interested. Everyone has a story to tell, and we look forward to hearing yours.

### Regular Columns

- Consult the description at the top of each of the Regular Columns in this issue.
- Length: 1,500 - 3000 words
- Submit articles to the respective column editors.

### Feature Articles

- These articles are longer and/or deal with topics not covered by the Regular Columns.
- Length: Up to 3,000 words or longer.
- Submit articles to the editor at lancestilp@gmail.com

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**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: December 15th**

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## Coordinator's Message

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Dear Bilingualism SIG members!

First of all, we, the Decision-Making Team (DMT) would like to thank each and all of you for your support throughout years. The SIG would not have existed without your membership. We all truly appreciate it and look forward to welcoming all our members to join us at the JALT 2018 Annual International Conference at the Shizuoka Convention and Arts Center. First and foremost, we would like to take this opportunity and invite all of you to attend the BSIG AGM scheduled on November 25th, 2018 at 11:35-12:20 in the room 907. We encourage all our members to attend the meeting and take part in the SIG's Officer Elections. We are constantly looking for new members to join the DMT, therefore, it would be great if you could consider running for any Officer position.

If you have any further questions related to the SIG Officer roles and responsibilities please do send an e-mail at alexshaitan@yahoo.com and we will respond to your queries as soon as we can.

We would like to thank Cynthia Smith, Robert McLaughlin, Ron Murphy and Yuki Fujiwara-Sigler for sharing their invaluable experiences with us. I hope you will enjoy reading the contributions by our valuable members.

**Wishing you all a wonderful academic year of 2018-2019!**

Best wishes,

Bilingualism SIG Coordinator: Shaitan Alexandra



44th Annual International  
Conference on Language Teaching  
and Learning & Educational  
Materials Exhibition

Shizuoka Convention & Arts Center  
(Granship) Shizuoka City, Shizuoka, Japan  
Friday, November 23, to Monday,  
November 26, 2018

## Featured Bilingual Presentations

TIME	ROOM NO.	PRESENTER	TITLE
Nov 24 (Saturday); 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM	Tenji Gallery (6F) (JJ)	deBoer, Mark - Akita International University; Miyashita, Kanako - Akita International University; Hori, Koki - Akita International University	<a href="#">Bilingual Code-Switching in Student Collaboration</a>
Nov 24 (Saturday); 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	907	Keomany, Thongsouk - National University of Laos	<a href="#">The Impact of Using L1 in Teaching English Grammar</a>
Nov 24 (Saturday); 4:40 PM - 5:05 PM	Hikae 2 (1F) (JJ)	Cusen, Oana - Kwansai Gakuin University	<a href="#">Growing Up With Four Languages</a>
Nov 24 (Saturday); 5:15 PM - 5:40 PM	Hikae 2 (1F) (JJ)	Imai, Mitsuko - Tamagawa University	<a href="#">Factors of Perseverance in Bilingual Education</a>
Nov 24 (Saturday); 5:50 PM - 6:15 PM	Hikae 2 (1F) (JJ)	Klein, Mandy - Japan Center for Michigan Universities	<a href="#">A Corpus-Supported Literature Course for Returnees</a>
Nov 24 (Saturday); 6:25 PM - 6:50 PM	902	Goucher, Danielle - not yet known; Onoe, Keiichiro - not yet known	<a href="#">Tango Smash - English Language Technology</a>
Nov 24 (Saturday); 7:00 PM - 7:25 PM	Practice Room 1 (B1)	Stilp, Lance - Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University	<a href="#">Diversity Misconceptions in the English Classroom</a>
Nov 25 (Sunday); 11:35 AM - 12:20 PM	907	Shaitan, Alexandra - Gakushuin University	<a href="#">Bilingualism SIG Annual General Meeting</a>
Nov 25 (Sunday); 12:30 PM - 12:55 PM	910	North, Cameron - ESL Learning	<a href="#">Way To Go! Effective Listening &amp; Speaking Strategy</a>
Nov 25 (Sunday); 1:05 PM - 2:35 PM	909	Klein, Mandy - Japan Center for Michigan Universities	<a href="#">Highly Proficient Bilinguals Share Their Stories</a>
Nov 26 (Monday); 1:55 PM - 2:20 PM	1101	Feijo, Flavia - The University of Tokyo	<a href="#">A Narrative Study on Bilingual Brazilians</a>

Check out the full conference schedule and details at [www.jalt.org](http://www.jalt.org)

## Feature Article

Readers are encouraged to submit articles related to various other topics or issues related to language learning, identity, education, or child raising. Please contact the editor Lance Stilp at [lancestilp@gmail.com](mailto:lancestilp@gmail.com) for more information.

### Linguistics of Diversity

by Cynthia Smith

“Oh!” exclaims the elderly lady, looking down at my daughter as we stand waiting to cross the street. “She’s so cute! Is she half?” I smile and nod.

The woman continues enthusiastically, “So your husband is Japanese, then?”

I pause, looking from this stranger to my daughter, give a faint yes, and continue with my daughter down the street.

“Mommy,” my daughter pipes up. “Why did you say yes? You don’t have a husband!”

Similar conversations have played out countless times over the years, yet I still struggle with my response. Surrounded by assumptions of what a family in Japan should look like, I face a number of hurdles when trying to describe my identity and my relationships. As an American lesbian raising a daughter with my Japanese wife, how can I respond to this kind of personal small-talk? In a world that often does not recognize same-sex relationships, how should I balance my truth with my goal of communicating

clearly? In this column, I'll look at some of my experiences trying to describe and define myself and my family both in the United States and in Japan.

The words we select to describe ourselves and our relationships hold power, influencing both others' perceptions of us and our own self-perceptions. We can use them to fit in or to stand out, and our self-descriptions may change depending on the situation we are in. As we formulate these self-descriptions, we may be limited by the vocabulary at our disposal. If we can't find appropriate words to describe ourselves, our families, and our relationships—or if our listeners don't understand or accept the descriptions we use—how does that affect us?

I am not referring simply to a lack of language proficiency. Society, both in Japan and elsewhere, often expects people to fit into preordained social categories. If we buck those with unexpected self-descriptors, we may encounter confusion or even hostility. For example, we may attach a label to ourselves or our families that others tell us we are not entitled to use. An acquaintance who is a naturalized Japanese citizen illustrates this: he was met with disbelief when he stated that he was, in fact, Japanese; his listeners laughingly accused him of lying.

This type of pressure to conform to expected social categories can be difficult to navigate; the endless explaining and positioning can grow tiresome and stressful. In my mixed Japanese-American family, we face these issues not only due to our racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity, but also due to our sexual orientation. In particular, deciding when and how to disclose my sexual orientation has always taken mental and emotional energy.

The struggle to articulate my identity began years ago, in the United States. Even within the lesbian community, different identifiers held distinct nuances that members used to

project their desired identity. The younger activist crowd, of which I was a part, proudly claimed the label “dyke” when we spoke together; for us, the word “lesbian” referred to an older woman with a decidedly un-hip style. I thus recoiled at the thought of labeling myself “lesbian,” but I also hesitated to call myself a “dyke” to people outside my social circle because of its derogatory connotations. Thus, I typically settled for the genderless term “gay” to describe myself.

Semantics also became an issue when I spoke of my relationships. In most instances, I used the word “girlfriend” to refer to the women I dated. However, several straight women in my social circle tended to use “girlfriend” to speak of any close female friend, rendering the word ambiguous and leaving me without clear vocabulary to label my relationships.

At other times, vocabulary seemed pushed on me. I can still recall the first time someone in America asked me about my “wife.” It was around twenty years ago, before any legal recognition of same-sex marriage in the U.S., and although my wife and I had celebrated an elaborate Japanese-style wedding not long before, I always referred to her as my “partner” rather than my “wife.” Same-sex couples were not yet commonplace and I almost never heard a lesbian partner called a “wife.” So when this friend asked me about my “wife,” I was taken aback. Although this was an old family friend who was trying to be open and egalitarian, I felt discomfited because it seemed she was redefining my family relationships rather than respecting my own definitions.

I continued to contemplate her words—and my reaction—over the coming months. I slowly realized I was using the word “partner” as a code and shield. If my listener knew me well or was sympathetic to LGBT causes, they would likely recognize that I meant “same-sex partner.” On the other hand, if they chose to assume I was straight and to interpret

“partner” as a synonym for “boyfriend” or “husband,” I was still able to converse without subjecting myself to their disapproval.

I come from a liberal enclave on the west coast and am blessed with supportive friends and family; nevertheless, it took me years of marriage, and years of hearing lesbian spouses described as “wife” by friends and in the media, to feel comfortable presenting my own spouse as my “wife.” My comfort increased after we were (finally) legally married, ten years after our first wedding celebration and eight years after the birth of our daughter. The more I used the term “wife,” the less drama it held for me; it became a statement of fact rather than a daring piece of social activism. Now, when I converse in America, I always say “wife” because it is the truest word to define the reality of our relationship. Finally, I feel free from the confusion and awkward side-stepping that often resulted from avoiding saying the truth.

However, this freedom evaporates for me in Japan. I still feel anxious when I speak to someone of my “wife” for the first time, even when using English with other foreigners. I assume they will understand my meaning, but I worry about how will they react. I don’t want a passing reference to become the main theme of the conversation. I don’t want to be questioned or confronted about my lifestyle. And I don’t want my sexual orientation to be the main thing people remember me for.

Unfortunately, I have on occasion been subject to prejudiced assumptions from other English-speaking westerners in Japan. Once, upon submitting a journal article in which I mentioned my wife, I was accused of plagiarizing a piece that the editor claimed was written by my “husband.” Although I understood the editor’s confusion, I was shocked that he deemed plagiarism a more logical explanation. After I explained that my wife and I were in fact legally married, he

recommended that I use the word “partner” or “spouse” so as to not confuse readers and to allow me to retain my privacy. I declined to alter my writing, however, because I felt doing so delegitimized my relationship. Fortunately, we were able to sort out the issue, with me keeping the word “wife,” and the editor later seemed genuinely interested in spreading my family’s story in order to help normalize LGBTQ families.

This was, to be fair, an isolated incident. In general, when I speak in English in Japan, I am met with neutral to positive reactions. To my surprise, this has held true even within the language classroom, although unfortunately it took me years to discover this. For the first decade of my career, I went to great lengths to stay closeted from students and parents, fearing a loss of professional esteem if I came out as lesbian. (I was even warned before first coming to Japan that disclosing my sexuality could be grounds for a company firing me.) I had told myself I didn’t want to confuse students about the meanings of the English words “husband” and “wife,” but in reality I was more afraid of the turmoil that coming out might cause.

My process of coming out to students began by accident. I was an assistant teacher in a junior high school, and one day students and I were exchanging hand-written pretend text-messages. One group wrote, “Do you have a husband?” Although I try to be clear with students that personal questions are inappropriate in most situations, we had told the students to imagine they were text-messaging a friend, so I did not want to lecture them about propriety. As other groups’ papers piled up on my desk, I hastily responded, “No, I have a wife,” and passed the paper back. As I continued responding to other groups, a vague worry that I had said too much scratched at the back of my mind. Within just a few minutes, however, the group’s response came back. “Oh! Is she

beautiful?” I smiled and responded, and soon the class ended.

On the way back to the teacher’s room, I sheepishly told the main teacher that I may have shared overly personal information, and I recounted to her the story. She shrugged and told me, “Well, I know that some of our students’ parents...”

“Oh dear,” I thought, steeling myself for a rebuke.

She continued. “...are in the same situation and also have that kind of family. And I’m pretty sure some students are like you, too.” My eyes widened. I was not expecting this inclusivity! I had worked in public schools for years, but I had never heard any acknowledgment of LGBT students or parents. Only later did I realize that she never once used the words “gay,” “lesbian,” “sexual minority” (a term commonly used in Japanese) or anything similar. It seemed that LGBT students and families were recognized informally, but they were never legitimized. They remained in the shadows, unnamed.

Later, I moved to a teaching position at a vocational college, and then to a university. At the tertiary level, I have found an open, welcoming atmosphere. Typically, in my first lesson with students I invite them to ask me any questions they may have, and invariably, someone asks about my family. Initially I only discussed with them the appropriateness of asking personal questions to new acquaintances (particularly someone of higher standing), but in the past few years I have decided to use the questions as a stepping stone to come out to my students in a natural way. This has been an interesting intersection of culture and language, as lower level students have occasionally needed quite explicit explanations before they could understand that “wife” could refer to a lesbian spouse. Across the board, however, I have received positive reactions, with several students actually clapping (though I still don’t

understand the reason for such enthusiasm). Thus, in both social and professional situations, when I speak in English in Japan I feel more and more free to refer to my wife without needing to cover up.

When I speak in Japanese, however, I find myself struggling much more to explain my identity. Several times I have tried telling people that I was “gay,” but my audience interpreted it as a shortened version of *geinojin* (celebrity), and asked what TV shows I had been on. I realized I would have to I resort to calling myself “lesbian,” which still feels a bit to me like labeling myself “washed-up dork.” In addition, although the word “lesbian,” often abbreviated *rezu*, is widely understood in Japan, it is seldom used outside of the porn industry (Chalmers, 2002), which lends it another degrading element. However, there are no alternatives which are readily understood by Japanese people.

Describing my family relationships has been equally frustrating. As a Japanese language learner, I am accustomed to occasional misunderstandings, but I don’t believe these particular difficulties stem from a simple lack of proficiency. Even my wife and daughter, both native Japanese speakers, have shared many experiences of being misunderstood or of having family members mislabeled. My wife has found that even directly explaining that her partner is a woman has not led to clarity, and she has sometimes resorted to showing people our wedding photos to help them understand. She has told me that she tends to use the word “partner” rather than “wife” to describe me in Japanese, because she feels “wife” would only cause more confusion. Indeed, on the few occasions I have used one of the Japanese words for wife, such as *tsuma*, my listeners have assumed I was making a vocabulary mistake, and some have even advised me to say *danna* (husband). However, when I have used the word “partner,” even when I have specified that my partner is a woman, Japanese listeners typically have

either given me a blank look or continued to ask me about my “husband.” When, by way of explanation, I told a group of listeners that my daughter had two mothers, they nodded approvingly and asked if the other mother was an aunt or a grandmother.

Even for straight couples, the linguistics of marriage can be tricky. One issue is that there is a variety of terms, each with a slightly different nuance, to refer to one’s spouse. In an online group for foreign married women in Japan, I recently saw an entire thread devoted to how they refer to their husbands. From the surprisingly large variety of words that can be used for “husband”, some chose *shujin*, some *otto*, others *danna*. The vocabulary for “wife” is also varied, with *tsuma* and *okusan* the most common. A friend suggested that I use the word *tsureai* (significant other) to refer to my wife, but similar to “partner,” its meaning is ambiguous; it does not always denote a spouse. In addition, it is rare enough that I feel it stands out as odd.

The amount of mental energy I spend trying to talk around these words is frustrating. I find myself answering questions about my “husband” as if I had one, as in the opening vignette, or I talk about *uchi no hito* (family member) or the generic *kazoku* (family). It is surprising how often family relationships come up in conversations, even with simple messages such as “My wife needs the car that day so I can’t drive,” or “I have to check my wife’s work schedule before deciding,” or “My wife will be picking up our daughter today.” Although these interactions present only a passing reference to my wife, trying to convey my message without actually mentioning my wife requires an aggravating amount of effort. Yet the alternative—being misunderstood, falsely corrected, and forced to spend time explaining my family—is sometimes even more troublesome.

Peoples’ reactions, though, should perhaps not come as a surprise. Most Japanese seem to

retain a strongly heteronormative image of the terms “husband” and “wife.” This may be in part because in Japan, same-sex marriages are not yet legally recognized; in fact, although my wife and I are legally married in the United States and planned our family carefully, according to Japanese law we have no relation, and I am considered a single mother. In addition, same-sex marriage is not the hot-button issue in Japan that it is in many countries. It is rarely discussed in the media or by politicians, and few activists here are pushing for it. Even same-sex legal partnerships have been slow to gain traction, with only eight cities and wards currently providing any kind of same-sex partnerships (“Osaka to start recognizing LGBT couples,” 2018) and just 16 couples registering in Shibuya ward in the first year after it began issuing partnership documents in 2015 (Kheen, 2017). Thus, same-sex spouses are simply not a daily reality for most Japanese. Without the constant presence of out LGBT people in the media, at work, and in society at large, I feel that LGBT existences are much more under-the-radar here. Even people who label themselves as progressive or open have been startled when I have disclosed explicitly that I am lesbian and my partner is a woman, or when I have spoken in English of my “wife.”

Couples that do go forward with partnerships or wedding-style ceremonies typically continue to use the generic term “partner,” without any specific change of vocabulary to denote the change in their relationship. Actress-turned-LGBT-activist Koyuki Higashi, for example, celebrated an elaborate (but non legally-binding) wedding at Tokyo Disneyland and afterwards referred in tweets and interviews to her “partner” (see, for example, Tabuchi, 2013). Words like *tsuma* and *danna* are simply not used in Japanese to refer to same-sex spouses, and even the word “partner,” although it is gaining traction in gay circles and among youth, remains unfamiliar to many Japanese, particularly

older generations. It also is not specific to same-sex couples; as in English, “partner” in Japanese can refer to heterosexual couples as well. In my experience many Japanese either do not recognize the katakana word “partner” or do not grasp its same-sex connotations and continue to assume that my partner is male.

A poll conducted by researchers in 2015 reported that 51% of Japanese support same-sex marriage, unions, or partnerships (Watanabe, 2015). This is important in that it shows that a majority of Japanese people believe that same-sex couples should have at least some rights. However, there is a big difference between a “partnership” and a “marriage.” As many researchers have noted, claiming an identity can be a way to signal one’s belonging in a group. When I mention my “wife” instead of my “partner,” it is an implicit message that my marriage is real and valid. In Japanese, however, I lose that option. Even though I am legally married (in America, at least), there is no simple term at my disposal that readily makes this clear. In fact, I have found no satisfactory way to speak about my wife in Japanese. Although with family and friends I can simply use her name, I remain at a loss when speaking to people who don’t know her. I am left attempting verbal acrobatics, trying to convey my message without actually specifying who I am talking about.

There has been but one instance I know of that a Japanese person, speaking to other Japanese people, has referred to my wife using the word *tsuma*. It happened after a lesson I held with a group of adult students who are well-traveled, internationally aware, and interested in current events. I had previously disclosed my sexuality and marital status to the students, and several months later, in an unrelated lesson with the same group of students, I showed a picture of my wife to illustrate a point about printing. When a student asked who it was, another answered in Japanese, “That’s Cynthia’s wife.” It was the

first time I had heard the Japanese word *tsuma* used to refer to a lesbian spouse, and I felt a wave of surprise and gratefulness to have my family included as normal. After hearing her say this, and witnessing the other student immediately understand her meaning, I began to wonder if such inclusive usage is simply a matter of getting used to. Just as I needed repeated exposure to feel comfortable using the English word “wife” to refer to a lesbian spouse, perhaps Japanese speakers will, with enough exposure, broaden their definitions of words like *tsuma* or *danna*. We may discover that social categories and their defining vocabulary are more elastic than we had realized, if only someone takes the initiative to stretch them.

I have heard many people say that Japan needs to become more accepting of racial and cultural diversity. I believe the same holds true for other types of family diversity, including LGBT couples, adoptive parents, and blended families. Like cultures, languages evolve and definitions change. No single person or group owns the rights to words. They belong to all of us who use them, and if we choose to broaden our visions, we can help create a society where all people can feel comfortable describing themselves as they choose.

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## Bilingual Case-Study

### ある家庭におけるバイリンガリズム

In each issue, we present a case-study of a bilingual individual or family. We especially want to encourage our members to write up their own case studies of their bilingual families. The column editors would be happy to offer you assistance in writing your stories. You may also request an outline of suggested items to include. Also, if you know of a family that could be featured in this column, please contact the column editors: Ron Murphy, Ehime University, English Education Center, 3-bunkyou cho, Matsuyama, 790-8577. t: 089-927-9358 email: [murphy@iec.ehime-u.ac.jp](mailto:murphy@iec.ehime-u.ac.jp); or Alec McAulay, GSISS, Yokohama National University, Tokiwadai 79-3, Hodogaya-ku, Yokohama 240-8501 t: 045-339-3553 (w) email: [tokyomcaulay@gmail.com](mailto:tokyomcaulay@gmail.com)

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## In Hindsight; the Mistakes, Successes and Hidden Hurdles in Raising Our Bilingual Daughter

by Robert McLaughlin  
[rawbbiemc@yahoo.ca](mailto:rawbbiemc@yahoo.ca)

The approach of fall sees my daughter reaching the end of her last year in elementary school, and this has given me pause to take stock of her progress in English thus far. There is much to consider when I think over how her level of fluency has been shaped by the interplay of decisions and her environment and schooling. Most certainly there have been regrets but “hindsight is 20/20” as the saying goes. Like so much else in life, raising a child to be bilingual does not follow a clear path laid out with stepping stones to progress along. Looking back on our past decisions with a critical eye, it can be all too easy to see where we went wrong, though the situation at the time did not give us such clarity. Parents in Japan, aiming for our child to be fluent and literate in two languages, are in a constant state of building on successes, righting errors, tweaking techniques, and even aborting approaches in favour of a new course. Sharing our stories with one another and gleaning new ideas and knowledge has a valuable role for us, and I have taken much from the articles of this journal in my readings over the years. In that spirit, I wish to share this case study so that readers may

perhaps learn from my experience with my daughter. Please feel free to contact me to give feedback and any advice.

This case study outlines the upbringing of my 12-year-old daughter Airi, and looks at where we went right, where we erred, and what we now wish we had known. I will conclude with the current status of my daughter's language abilities and how we now aim to improve her fluency in English.

### Background

Our family is composed of myself, a Canadian university teacher and part-time yoga instructor (50), my wife Miho, a translator (English-Japanese) and yoga instructor, and our daughter Airi (12; 9). We live in Shizuoka City and have raised our daughter entirely in Japan, though we have taken month-long trips to Canada every spring or summer and this has aided immeasurably in improving our daughter's ability and confidence to communicate in English. My wife would be considered a near-balanced bilingual and, having lived in

Australia for a year and worked for six-month stints in both Canada and the US, has a high degree of cross-cultural awareness. My Japanese is at an intermediate functional level at best. I can communicate without much effort in nearly all daily situations but cannot read or write beyond an early native elementary level. Due to this, we converse largely in English in the home, depending on the language level of any visitors to the house. When I am not present, my wife and daughter speak entirely in Japanese.

Prior to coming to Japan in 1995, I had graduated university in Canada with a B.Ed. in Secondary Education, a provincial teaching license and teaching areas in Social Studies and English. The courses in literacy building and reading were to later serve me well in raising Airi, as the approach then to achieving literacy in our students was through a balance of Whole Language Learning (such as Silent Sustained Reading) and phonics courses. This mirrored my own parents' view of their role in raising children, with a strict household rule of limited television viewing time and an emphasis on building literacy in the home through bedtime readings and daily family reading time in the evening. Summers were largely spent on a small, remote island on Canada's west coast where television wasn't available, and this 'deprivation' helped increase my reading fluency at a young age. This developed an early love of literature and my reading and writing grades were high throughout my schooling. The idea that exposure to literature at an early age has a strong correlation to fluency in a language was therefore a conviction I developed early on.

However, this must be contrasted with my experience as a learner of public schooling French from elementary school through to high school. Despite passing all the required courses over the five years, as nearly all Canadians must do as part of Canada's official status as a bilingual country, I had

halting French and could converse using only a handful of pat phrases. My brother attended a French immersion elementary school in Canada, but this came at the detriment of his secondary schooling classes conducted in English, and he barely squeaked by to graduate.

### Beginnings

When my wife and I met in 2000, we were working together in a corporate training program for new employees in a large automotive parts and technology company. In the three years we worked together in North America and Japan, we helped train young Japanese white-collar workers to communicate in English in an overseas corporate setting and to gain insight and experience in intercultural communication. My wife had spent a year in Australia as a Japanese teaching assistant in public elementary schools and had worked in New Zealand and Samoa for the corporate training program prior to my joining the company. We both developed an appreciation for the important role of first-hand experience in the second-language environment and believed that this worked hand-in-hand with study in building true fluency in a second language. A high majority of the hundreds of employees we worked with had studied English for nine years, and some even more, but needed time spent immersed in an English environment outside of Japan to competently engage in conversation and even relate to non-Japanese and to get over their common-held fears or anxieties related to speaking English. When we decided to marry, we agreed to make it a priority for our children to spend as much time overseas as possible and to take an active role in developing their bilingualism.

During my last year in corporate training, I started my M.Ed in TESL and took courses in Bilingualism and Childhood Bilingualism. I felt, naively it seems now, that my children would be raised to be balanced bilinguals.

However, neither lengthy readings nor direct experience could prepare us for the unforeseen challenges that lay ahead.

### Early Success

My wife and I made the decision to follow the One Parent, One Language approach before my daughter was born and, with my wife being bilingual, we had a big advantage in the early years. Due to my wife's high level of fluency in English and my (much) lower level of Japanese, we spoke almost entirely in English. Early on in our marriage, we decided that we would speak in English when we were with Airi, and in Japanese when Japanese speakers, such as her family, were present. Miho would speak to Airi entirely in Japanese but would translate occasionally some of the contents of their "conversations" to me in English. My wife retired from her full-time work to spend time with Airi and we both made her bilingualism a priority from birth. Miho would read aloud to Airi in Japanese every day and play Japanese children's music at home, and I would do the same in English. Airi grew up with standard Japanese kids' songs such as "Genkotsu Yama" as much as she did "Banana Phone" and "This Old Man". In addition to the fare offered on NHK and SBS, English children's TV programs such as Dora The Explorer and The Wiggles were ordered on DVD. Airi was delighted when she travelled to Canada to find the same shows on Canadian television and could generally understand what her grandparents were reading to her at bedtime.

Though our neighborhood was composed entirely of Japanese families, there was an association in Shizuoka for parents and children of mixed-families called Earth Family and we made efforts to attend some picnics and other events early on. This provided Airi with other role models and the events became regular seasonal activities she looked forward to over the years. We still keep in touch with the members of this association

and meet at Christmas and on a few other occasions throughout the year.

Another advantage we had was with the flexible schedule my position as a university lecturer afforded us. My workplace was located within walking distance of home, and I made every effort to have dinner, bath time, and bedtime readings with Airi in those first few years. We read classic children's books together and other, more recent interactive type books like Dora the Explorer and the recent Curious George books. My wife and I achieved a balance in Airi's early years and by four years old, Airi was an expressive, happy child who was as comfortable using English as she was using Japanese.

One point that stands apart in my memory was Airi's early introduction to the "Baby Einstein" DVDs and the new "education" apps that were appearing around 2006-2007. If I had any regret about how we promoted Airi's early learning, it was that both were introduced too early and that they fostered a dependence on "screen time" that still exists. There were a few apps, most notably the read-aloud interactive books aimed at toddlers, that did perhaps serve Airi well, and gave her some ability to recognize short, whole-words and common word clusters. She was enthusiastic to use them, and from the standpoint of motivation for reading, it could be argued that this had a hand in her early learning, though it cannot be quantifiably measured. However, the addictive power of the iPad apps (and of the Baby Einstein DVDs), and their ability to pull a child away from traditional books, is more regretful than any small benefit they provided. If I could do it all again, I would not give my child access to an iPad until much later on in life.

### Kindergarten

At four, Airi went to a local private kindergarten, Aoizora Kindergarten, which focused on interaction with the local

environment and neighborhood, traditional crafts and farming, and hiking in the local hills. Inside activities were held in a 150-year-old farm house which had a well with hand-pumped water and a small rice field for the young farmers to learn first-hand where their gohan (rice) came from. There was very little emphasis on 'desk work' type learning, or even the Japanese language itself. This was to be largely left to the parents and instead they emphasized structured time outdoors. This actually worked out very well for us, as we could continue in our balanced approach to Airi's learning, and she received as much Japanese reading as she did English, and she gladly accepted English bedtime reading as much as Japanese.

Also, I tried to pick Airi up from the kindergarten two afternoons a week and I tried to speak to Japanese parents in Japanese and to Airi in Japanese while she was being picked up. Then we would walk home together and talk in English about what she had seen and done that day. I kept up with her progress at Aoizora and this provided context for our conversations in English.

At this time, I was able to access three different English reading sources that need mentioning. One was the iBooks application that had come with my first iPad. This provided access to dozens of classic stories such as Call of the Wild, Gulliver's Travels, Heidi, The Jungle Book, and Winnie the Pooh. With this, the narrative, vocabulary, and grammar forms that came with our regular bedtime reading of classic literature quickly heightened Airi's comprehension and we have continued to read classic literature to her, as well as that aimed at her age group. To this day, she asks for longer novels such as the Harry Potter series.

The second source came from my university's library, which has an Education Faculty, and so is very well stocked with English children's books and, in particular, the various graded

readers series widely available in Japan. Of particular note was the popular "Tree House" series, which truly captivated Airi's attention, much the way serial television could. The series uses real historical backgrounds and events as well as connection to the Earth's environment and thus provided her with some holistic learning. For my part, I tried to have her recount the events in the book from the previous reading session and to imagine the events that would unfold in coming chapters.

Lastly, there were a few talking book Apps available on the iPad that were useful and did have more educational merit than simple "edutainment". Of note were the Curious George books, which offered three choices for the child and parent; the parent to read the story aloud (and interact with the activities), the talking book function (with the child interacting) and the recording function, in which the child and parent read aloud together and record their voices. Of the various interactive talking books that we used, this one proved the most interactive and memorable for Airi. It worked well when partnered with the award-winning American public television animated series "Curious George", which provided the young audience with basic science and environmental knowledge in an entertaining story.

#### Elementary School

Going in to elementary school, Airi was at a level of fluency in English comparable to that of English-speaking children her age and showed herself well able to communicate with family members and children on our trips to Canada. It was at this point however, that we made our first error in developing her bilingualism. My university operates a private elementary school near my home and offered employees and faculty substantial discounts on the monthly fees and tuition. Moreover, the school boasted classes of 15 students, an English program from grade one, two full-time native speakers of English and a

well-regarded music program. Compared to other schools in Shizuoka, this was a logical choice for us. Meeting the native-teachers of English, who were older, established in the area, and with children of their own, alleviated my worries about the English program. Lastly, there were other students from mixed families in the school, including another from Airi's kindergarten who was also growing up bilingually. Airi wouldn't be alone and would have English lessons in small classes with personal attention. What could go wrong?

My wife and I had, at this point, made efforts not to put much emphasis on Airi learning kanji or English phonics or spelling. We both agreed that this would come at elementary school and that we would rather she appreciate the enjoyment of language learning and the advances that would come through reading stories of different levels. Her new elementary school would start with the alphabet and use a reading program based on the Oxford Reading Tree series, which should allow Airi to move ahead through the books, I reasoned.

However, within her first two years at elementary school we realized that this was not the case. There was to be no individual attention, nor allowances made for children's different levels of English. All the children were to rigorously follow the set curriculum. Not even a worksheet for more advanced learnings, e.g., four letter words instead of ABC practice, would be given, even after I asked the teachers to do so. Airi found the lessons completely boring and far too easy for her. Even once reading started, the children were never given SSR (silent sustained reading) and would only read short sentences aloud. Though the popular Oxford Reading Tree graded reader series offers students a wide range of levels, Airi's class used a lower level volume for reading sessions, and students were not given access to other levels for independent reading. Airi was to be stuck at

the beginner level. The approach commonly used during the lessons was for the native teacher to introduce a lesson and teach the content, and the Japanese teacher would translate all the content verbatim. Allowing children to learn through active learning, experience, trial-and-error, and using their own listening skills effectively was not to be the way. As a result, at the end of the fifth grade, few of Airi's Japanese classmates could manage to go beyond greetings and use of a few stock phrases and basic vocabulary during my conversations with them.

This sad state must be given in context, however, with the amount of homework the students are given. From first grade, Airi would come home with 90 minutes to two hours or more of homework every day from various subjects (except English). This generally seemed to be rote work, with focus on memorizing math tables and kanji. There was also a daily diary and in fourth grade I inquired whether parts of her diary, especially those written every day during her winter, spring and summer holidays, could be written in English. This was rebuffed as it was felt that the Japanese teacher would not be able to read her entries. Airi had so much homework that the attempt to balance this and other facets of daily life, with her short, valuable daily free time, meant she really had little energy or inclination towards learning English from me. Even her interest in the talking books in the iPad abated as she simply felt too tired to concentrate after all the homework was doing in the evening.

My mistake was to not be involved in her English learning at school earlier on, and to insist on structured supplementary learning on weekends. Her fluency in spoken English progressed well with input from the various sources mentioned previously, but she fell far behind in reading and writing. Unfortunately, in Shizuoka, there seemed to be no English learning circles, and only an eikaiwa offering

private lessons at a substantial cost offered a solution.

The lack of flexibility on the part of her elementary school and its stubborn fixation on having every child in the small classes receive instruction and materials at the same level was something we had not anticipated. As an educator, the approach of the elementary school and its attitude towards education in general smacked of the conservative "proficiency versus growth" argument that was part of Canadian education over 40 years ago. By the end of the third grade, I had largely given up on the school helping my daughter in any way. However, during Airi's fourth year, she was given an unexpected opportunity to use her English at school in a way that would help her progress in a more individual, personal way.

## Eiken

Since 2004, I have been employed as an interview examiner for the nation-wide English proficiency test known by its popular name as the Eiken test. In the beginning of Airi's fourth year, we were informed that all the students in her grade were going to take the fifth grade of the Eiken test and that students would be allowed to freely progress through the levels of the test throughout their enrolment in the school. More importantly, the school's English teachers would be available to give guidance and practice testing for those taking the tests. Though I had only tested the upper levels of Pre-1 and 2, I was delighted to hear that Airi could take the tests and that we could coach her at home with materials widely available from bookstores. She was very keen to try, and since then has passed the 5th, 4th, 3rd and Pre-2 levels. She is now aiming to pass the second level, a level normally attempted by high school and college-level students. Though the vocabulary and readings are beyond her at this point, she has targeted passing the test before her graduation in spring 2018. Though there has

been criticism of this test for young learners, my own opinion is that, for parents of bilingual children who find themselves faced with limited opportunities in structured learning outside of school, and schools uninterested and uncooperative towards raising their child's level of English, the Eiken does provide a bridge to tying together learnings aimed at improving literacy with measurable outcomes. Due to the ample materials available, both online and in bookstores, parents can be involved in the learning process, if time allows.

## Alternatives

As Airi remained plodding along through her elementary school English program and was often overwhelmed by the sheer volume of homework that took up hours of her time (and often ours) every day, we tried to balance her time with other activities to help her develop into a well-rounded person, capable of pursuing her own interests and passions as she matured. Her elementary school had a well-regarded music program, and she was also taking piano lessons with a teacher in our neighborhood. She attends local karate classes and she often takes part in the yoga lessons we hold in our small home studio. This hasn't left much time or energy for attempting a regular English home-study program to bolster that of her elementary school. The Eiken study and my efforts to include irregular guided readings in lower-level graded readers has added more than enough to our schedule and no one in the house wants to push the matter, though this may change with time and the approach of a fork in the road with junior high school choices.

However, family time on weekends and holidays has provided a good source of alternatives to focused study, in the form of board games and trivia card-based activities. When Airi was seven, I purchased the classic board game 'Sorry,' which I had done with a large measure of nostalgia, remembering

moments of enjoyment I had had with my family playing the game. 'Sorry' is an active, fun game aimed at all ages, and though part of its popularity may stem from its utter simplicity, it does include cards that need to be read aloud throughout the game. Airi quickly learned these cards through repetition and it was a hit with our family and with friends her age that came to visit. Since then we have purchased other board games, most recently The Game of Life, which contains far more reading with a variety of cards and written scenarios.

While on holiday in Canada we came across a trivia-based game, part of a series called Professor Noggin's Card Games. We purchased the Marine Life game and it was immediately a hit while we were abroad. Part of a series of 38 games, the game offers two levels of difficulty on the cards and thus younger children can play with older children or parents, and each card has a captivating artistic graphic that serves to give visual cues to the answers. We have since purchased four more games from the series through Amazon and intend to add more to our collection. Besides facilitating reading practice and knowledge building, the ease of play and inclusion of surprising facts add a dimension of conversation to the game. Topics such as Pets, Geography, Countries of the World, Marine Life, Wildlife of North America, Space, Our Bodies and Health, give general knowledge and some element of cultural knowledge, and seem to promote intellectual curiosity.

### Meeting Coming Challenges

Finally, there is the matter of our daughter's coming choices with formal education after elementary school. Another unforeseen situation we will soon face is the limited choices for junior high schools here in Shizuoka City. When we moved to our suburban neighborhood, we factored in its closeness to amenities such as shopping and

the bus line, as well as the relative close distance to my employer. A relatively natural setting was important as well, with distance to a river we could swim in, trails we could walk on with our dog, and simple clean air and a view of mountains far more important than being close to a central train station and the stress that would come with the crowds and fast pace of life that accompanies the Japanese concept of "convenience". We thought we had found a good balance of life when we purchased our home. However, despite Shizuoka's population of over 700,000 and its status as the educational, governmental, and corporate centre of the prefecture, there are no junior high schools with anything but a standard introductory English program. The closest available school that would suit Airi is the well-regarded Katoh Gakuen immersion school, over two hours away from our home. Giving our daughter a lonely four-hour daily commute, on top of the regime of homework she faces, seems far more of a detriment to her educational and academic progress than the benefits it may or may not bring. Other families in our area have told us of the frustration they felt when their bilingual children were placed in the area's public and private junior high schools, with their children placed in classes with all the other students starting at the most basic of levels and katakana often being used in the lessons. As in the case of my daughter's elementary school, it seems that "no exceptions" is the rule across the board here in Shizuoka. Our regret here, and one that we should have had the foresight to see when we bought the house, is that we really needed to be as close to the main train line as possible or to have been in a situation where we could have easily moved cities to meet my daughter's educational needs. A house in the suburbs of anything but the largest of Japanese cities is not something I would recommend to anyone wishing to raise their children in a bilingual home and have the support of a structured English education program aimed at promoting bilingual students or at least supporting those students

with a higher level of English. We are now considering sending Airi to Canada to live for at least one year of junior high school and perhaps all of high school. This idea pains us both and we are still only contemplating the idea, but we are faced with little other choice. Luckily, Airi is enthusiastically on board with this idea, and, having spent many happy summers in Canada, has a very positive image of being there and living with members of her Canadian family. At this point, she identifies herself as “Japanese with a Canadian father” but also often asks to spend more time in Canada and, in particular, to spend more time with her Canadian family members. My wife and I both feel confident that our efforts to take trips to Canada with Airi have paid off well with her attitude and perspective towards living outside of Japan.

In conclusion, we are relatively happy with many of the choices and measures taken to foster our daughter Airi's English. She has a level of comprehension of spoken English close to or equal to that of children her own age she meets in Canada, and she is reading at a level that indicates that she will be able to

catch up to her respective age level in the coming years, provided that there is more focus on reading. Our efforts to read a variety of literature to her have contributed most greatly to this and, along with the OPOL approach, provided an invaluable amount of input of English for her. The battle between maintaining a school/life balance and raising her level of English continues, but she is at the level where she can learn much on her own and, thankfully, Airi does possess an innate curiosity about the world, particularly the natural world, and this helps to facilitate her learning in English. She is quite happy to watch documentaries with me or TV shows on her own, and play educational style board games with us. Despite some success, we made several errors along the way, and find ourselves exasperated with the limitations we have faced and will face in her formal education. I hope, in writing this, that anyone reading may take some valuable information with them in making their own choices.

Lastly, I welcome any and all feedback or comments.

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## **Raising Rei -- From L.A. to Ehime. Then, Back Again?**

by Ron Murphy

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Introduction to the family:

The following interview features Todd (American) and Kanako (Japanese), detailing how they raised their daughter Rei (6;9) to be balanced bilingually (including literacy) and culturally between America and Japan. Kanako lived in the U.S. for many years, from age 17, and is both fluent and natural in English. She and Todd have used English exclusively throughout their time together, and Japanese came into the mother-daughter relationship shortly after Rei arrived. The couple lived happily in Los Angeles with annual trips to visit her family in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture. These visits eventually led Todd to seriously consider moving his family to Japan, at least for a few years while Rei was still young. Kanako, who was more than content to continue living in L.A., was not initially supportive of that idea. However, they finally moved to Matsuyama in March of 2017 with the thought of alternating living there, then in the U.S., for 2-3 year periods. While conceding that that plan might be impractical, they are continuing their OPOL strategy and biliteracy focus with Rei, who is enrolled in a local public school and doing fine. Kanako, a stay-at-home mother, admits to being pleasantly surprised at how much she is enjoying being back in her own culture and living in a comfortable, small city. Todd, who worked in marketing and management for various record labels in L.A., has successfully taken that experience and begun his own on-line music consultancy business. The interviewer is Ron Murphy, identified as RM in the following transcript.

The interview began humorously, with Kanako correcting Todd's mistaken

recollection of her language use with Rei when Rei was pre pre-school....

Todd: For the most part, I heard you speaking a lot of Japanese.

Kanako: No, I wasn't. I tried to talk to her in Japanese but she always answered in English. So I had to make a real conscious effort to speak to her in Japanese and a lot of times it was tough because she only answered in English.

RM: Was there pushback by her?

Kanako: No, not really. She understood what I was saying, but she was more comfortable in English. While we were in L.A., I would say that her English was a 10 and her Japanese was a 6.

RM: So how did her Japanese get to a 6?

Kanako: We started reading books to her at two months old. We read to her in both English and Japanese every chance we could.

Todd: We still do. That still goes on. Sticking with that every night in both languages I think is the single most effective thing we did. All those reps, that consistency; she was forced to hear two languages every day of her life.

RM: What other resources did you use for input?

Kanako: We bought children's DVDs like Inai Inai Ba! and Okaa-san to Isshou and Anpan Man. As she got to about pre-school, she began watching more English-language kids' shows, but until that point her screen time was mostly Japanese.

Todd: She sang a lot, too. We often sang Japanese songs in the car, and had hiragana posters in the bath tub, and the English alphabet also.

Kanako: We also started using Kumon books in both English and Japanese around age 2.

RM: So she had a lot of chances to get input, but when did her production begin?

Kanako: When she was 4, the nen-cho phase in Japanese. She started at a Japanese Saturday kindergarten in L.A. once a week for a year.

Todd: At first, she was pretty quiet at the school, but after about four weeks she began talking to her classmates in Japanese and she just took off and never looked back.

RM: Did she begin using more Japanese at home after that?

Kanako: When she first got home, she would often use Japanese with me, but by the end of the day she was all back to English only.

RM: Just to backtrack for a second, in the beginning did you two discuss any strategies for her bilingualism?

Kanako: Initially, I wasn't really thinking about making Rei bilingual. Honestly, I didn't really think it would be necessary. We didn't have any plan to move to Japan at that point, so if we were going to live in America I wanted her to speak good English. Since I was a stay-at-home mom and English is my second language, I didn't want it to negatively affect her English. But I was hoping that she would pick up some Japanese so she could talk to my family in Japan. But Todd, on the other hand, was like "No! She needs to be bilingual! And not just speaking, but reading and writing too." And I thought, well, that's not a bad thing.

Todd: But at that time, I didn't know what that entailed. The goals that I wrote down were for Rei to be conversationally fluent, with semi-fluent writing literacy. And next was for Rei to remain interested in both

languages and cultures so she would have motivation to have writing literacy in both languages. The third and last was for Rei to have the ability to enjoy both countries and cultures, and have flexibility and a kind of edge in the job market.

Kanako: So after we decided that we wanted Rei to be completely bilingual, we then began thinking “How are we going to do it?” That’s when we began buying the materials we mentioned earlier, like Japanese DVDs, Japanese toys that had hiragana or kanji, and Japanese songs. But we didn’t have anyone to talk to about raising a bilingual child. I talked to some people who had mixed-nationality kids here, but most of those kids were English dominant and the minority language was quite weak.

RM. So what did you do then?

Kanako: We started her at Kumon, and did it ourselves. I spent a lot of time with her because I was a stay-at-home mom.

RM. You had no network that you could plug into? No Japanese Saturday schools?

Todd: No, not really. It was really just my wife’s hard work at home. It was basically home-schooling. We did have Japanese Saturday school and Rei went for one year from age 4 to 5, just before we moved to Japan. But until then, not much of a network – just a few people scattered around the massive L.A. and Orange County region.

RM: So, she really didn’t have Japanese peers to converse with in Japanese?

Todd: Well, L.A. has a big Japanese population and infrastructure, and cultural festivals and book stores and supermarkets and stuff like that, but it’s so spread out that it takes 45 minutes one-way to do anything. So that prevented Rei from having many playmates in the early years.

Kanako: When it came time to consider pre-school, we discussed whether to send her to an all-English school or all-Japanese school. But the Japanese preschools were all an hour drive or more away. So, we decided on English preschool. But I was confident that I could teach her Japanese at home and keep it up good enough.

RM. So where did her Japanese speaking ability come from prior to kindergarten?

Kanako: We brought Rei to Japan every year since her birth to see my family for two weeks. And as soon as we would land in Japan, some switch would turn on in her head and she would instantly start speaking Japanese. I guess she heard all the Japanese around her, and of course we stayed at my parent’s house, so there was full immersion every day.

RM: Was this from age 4?

Kanako: No. This was from about 14 months. It was really interesting, but then when we went back to L.A. she went back to speaking in English.

Todd: She had language talent from the start. She was speaking in sentences at about 18 months old. We got constant comments from people in public about how good she spoke for her young age.

RM: So, you had your challenges with the L.A. traffic, and no playmates for Rei until weekly kindergarten at age 4, but you had plenty of books and materials, and annual visits to Japan?

Todd: That’s right. The Japan trips were key, but so was the consistency we practiced with Rei, Kanako, and me too, putting in the work daily. But going forward there are some challenges that we see ahead. For example, forming relationships on a temporary, part-time basis is a worry. If our lifestyle

could be, possibly, split between going back and forth living in Japan and the U.S., it's hard to keep stable friendships. And there is the fear of her losing her motivation to stay engaged in both America and Japan. And one more thing is, when she's a little older, maybe her other interests like friends or clubs takes over and she loses interest in maintaining her bicultural and bilingual abilities.

RM: Okay, so we have a good picture of Rei's upbringing in the U.S. Let's switch to your move to Japan. Firstly, what was the reason for that?

Todd: I'll take that one. (laughs) Well, I worked in the music industry, for Sony Records. And I'm married to a Japanese, have a Japanese kid, and had come to Japan every year for 15 years, sometimes for business and sometimes for pleasure. So, I had a big interest in Japan. This place was drawing me in and I decided I wanted to try to live here for two years. And I thought it would be good for Kanako to reconnect with her family; and for Rei, too, to get immersed in the culture and know her grandparents and her one uncle.

Kanako: Well, to make a long story short, he wanted to live here. I didn't. But it was his dream, and I didn't want to hold that back. And the timing was good, too, because Rei was five and once she began school in the U.S. it would be difficult to take her out of school. So, two years was the plan.

Todd: But that has become three years, because we all are genuinely enjoying it here.

RM: Has the emphasis moved a little bit to trying to maintain her English? How has this moved changed your thinking or long-term concerns?

Kanako: I still focus on both English and Japanese, just like I always have. And it's

natural for her to be studying both because it's always been that way for her. As of now, her English is still a 10, but her Japanese is about a 9. I still feel that she has a bigger English vocabulary than Japanese, and can express herself better in English.

RM: Socially and culturally for Rei, things have been smooth?

Kanako: I think so.

Todd: In L.A., it's such a melting pot, that she was no different than anyone else in any way. Here, she's absolutely different because of the way she looks.

Todd, addressing Kanako: Is her behavior any different from the rest of the kids? Like her mannerisms? Is all that translating well here?

Kanako: Well, she's a little shyer here because she's always very outgoing. But she wasn't confident of her language skill here because she noticed that her Japanese wasn't quite as good as her peers her age. But she noticed that the kids who were a little younger than her spoke about her level. She was more comfortable hanging out with the younger kids. But now she's in first grade and doesn't have anybody younger, and it will be interesting to see how this is going to turn out.

RM: So, she's pretty much up to speed socially, culturally, linguistically?

Kanako: She's doing very well. She's keeping up with her English well because she speaks with Todd in English, though not so much with me anymore in English. But I talk to Todd in English, so she gets that exposure too.

Todd: But TV and movies, she seems to still prefer watching in English, right?

Kanako: Well, it's probably closer to 50-50. Some days she prefers Japanese shows, and other days watching in English.

RM: Well, say you do three years here. Will the move back be temporary as well?

Todd: In my mind, yes. Because I work on-line. As a consultant, I can work from anywhere, so we have the flexibility to live and work anywhere, so I have this idea that we can do a stint here and a stint there, and keep changing it up. And the only thing stopping that would be that we would let Rei make that decision at some point. If she's really planted roots here with friends, then that would factor into it.

Kanako: We've talked about possibly moving to other parts of the U.S., but we worry because other parts of the country have less resources in Japanese education. In L.A., we can find anything we need.

Todd: There's at least three immersion schools in Los Angeles, and I'm sure other big cities like San Francisco, Seattle, New York, and Boston must have a few too.

Kanako: When it comes time to move, we would definitely think about those types of resources that would be available for Rei.

Todd: We would definitely want to put her into an immersion school. We wouldn't want to undo the years of work that we've put in.

Kanako: And we don't want her English to become undone either. In fact, we have a series of workbooks from the States that give great language skills practice that is similar to what she was using in school. And math, too, because in the States they teach math differently than here. So, if we go back to the U.S., we don't want her to be behind.

Todd: We'd like her to stay one grade-year ahead of where she's supposed to be. We're

also thinking about an all-day Japanese school in L.A. where 90 percent of instruction is in Japanese; at least what they call the "important subjects."

[Here Todd begins asking the interviewer – a longtime resident in Japan and parent of a college-aged hafu daughter who attended only Japanese public schools -- his opinion on their plans for moving back and forth between the U.S. every three or four years, and what affect it might have on Rei.]

RM: Well, to me, that doesn't seem realistic. I mean, moving back when she's still mid-elementary school age might not cause too much "suffering," but I would caution against moving back directly into the junior high school phase here. I would advise moving back by at least the elementary sixth grade here so she could get reacclimated, make some friends, and so forth, before starting junior high, which is totally full-on. But with your plan, I think she would have the academic and language skills to succeed, though she might be a little behind in some areas.

Todd: Do you think the social aspect or academics would be more tough?

RM: (pause) Probably the social. That's a guess. But at that age, they are going through changes and the "group" is really strong at that stage. If she's not there at the start of junior high school to be able to choose the after-school club... if she gets there and the club is already set, she's going to be the "newbie" and be at a disadvantage in that way.

Kanako: It was a bit of a culture shock for Rei when we moved here, and she started kindergarten; all of the kids commented on her look. Her hair and eye color. I guess they were complimenting her but that was never brought up when we were living in America. All of sudden she was thinking 'Oh, I'm

different.’ She had a really tough time with that. It was only about a month, but a month is a long time for a five-year-old. She sometimes came home crying.

RM: But she’s fine now?

Kanako: She’s okay. But she had a very tough time.

Todd: Those big transitions can be really tough even for, say, an American kid in the heartland moving from one town to another. But moving across an ocean and to an entirely new culture is tough. So each time we do it, it’s definitely going to be some disruption and maybe even a little bit of scarring. We have to be very cautious of that.

RM: My assumption would be that if she comes back to Japan in 5th or 6th grade, she’ll be able to cope and get up to speed, and then when junior high school does start she’ll be starting that new stage with everyone else and those scars might be avoided.

Todd: I want to apply that theory, but I don’t want to be so cautious, to just stay in one place so as to make it easy for her. I think that those types of developmental things in someone’s life makes them who they are, and the more experiences you have the more adversity you face in this life, and it builds character.

RM: It wasn’t my place to comment that, for example, whatever doesn’t kill you only makes you stronger, but I imagine that because Rei is so totally “bi” (bilingual, bicultural) that she will be able to handle the transitions. And, possibly, it will make her stronger in the long run, and maybe more empathetic or compassionate.

Todd: One thing that you mentioned in a previous conversation that helped me was about the constant friendship that your daughter had with one or two girls in

Michigan and that being a real nice factor for stability. I think if there is a lot of big change in Rei’s life, it would be nice if she had something constant, because it’s not fun to have just casual relationships. You need friends and family that are constants in your life. I want her to have that. So we have to work hard to keep those connections.

Kanako: She has a couple of friends in America that she still keeps in touch with. We Skype from time to time.

Todd: A couple of weeks ago she Skyped with her friends in America, and afterwards she cried after the call, saying “I miss them.”

RM: Are you planning to go back for a visit? Like you used to come yearly to Japan for two weeks.....

Todd: Our plan was that we would be two years here with no trips planned, but hopefully friends and family coming to visit us. But if we stay beyond two years, we’ll take a trip back to see our family.

RM: Yeah, that would be important, to let her keep up with some of the “girlie” stuff, and the changes that happen in the culture and as her friends mature. If she goes back and is unaware of those things, she’ll realize that there’s a gap that’s grown between her and her friends, and her friends might realize it too and then there is that possible breach.

Kanako: It’s easy with her “BFF”, as she calls her, because our family is friends with their family.

Todd: But we have to put some work into that, because even for our own well-being, we need to have strong relationships with a few good friends and our family because this lifestyle could do damage to those relationships if we’re not careful.

RM: My daughter, back in the elementary school stage, had four or five good friends back in Michigan who she had met during her few weeks of annual schooling back then. We'd go back annually, and it was play, play, play! But then came junior high school and time got tight; our trips were cut back to every other year. And I could see that as these girls matured and were into their own things that some of these connections were not as strong as they used to be. And now she's basically down to just one friend who she still has a strong connection with. She has cousins that she's close with, but still only sees them for one day when we're back home because they are so busy with their own lives. But those 24 hours are precious – certainly better than nothing.

Kanako: It's tough with Rei's cousins, because they are much older than Rei. But it's really important.

RM: Yes, I agree it's really important to put some work into. And you also might want to put some consideration into where... well, at

some point you have to stay. When she gets into junior high or high school it might become, like you said, more of her decision than yours. She might not be so agreeable to pick up and leave again.

Todd: It's really interesting because we've kept it very open-ended and flexible, and with the thought that whatever we decide, life has a funny way of deciding for you. You can't plan ten years in advance.

RM: Well, unless there's something we haven't covered, should we wrap this up?

Kanako: Yeah, I think we've covered most everything. Thanks a lot for doing this with us.

Todd: Yeah, thank you. It's been interesting for us to review our parental journey so far.

RM: Well, thank you for your time and your story. You two have done a heck of a job raising Rei. Best of luck to you.

## Children's Resources

### 子供の教材

A column about books, magazines, and other resources for bilingual children in Japan, including: reviews and recommendations, information about where to get the resources, offers of resources to exchange, or give free to a good home (no sales, please) and calls for help from B-SIG members interested in producing their own children's resources.

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## Raising Bilingual Children in the U.S. : Saturday School and Such....

by Yuki Fujiwara-Sigler

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My name is Yuki Fujiwara-Sigler. In 2005, I moved to Ohio (USA) to work on a Masters of English for TESOL. After getting married to my husband in 2007, I realized that since I planned on staying in that area permanently, I would be better off teaching my native language. After taking classes for that purpose, I began teaching Japanese at several universities, both public and private, in the northeastern Ohio region. Then, after having children, my family became active with the

local Saturday Japanese Language School in our area. The following is a little bit of my family's background, and the resources we've been using up until now to foster bilingualism with our two children, Sora (9 yo) and Sam (4 yo).

We live in Burton, Ohio, a small village about forty miles east of Cleveland. The population is approximately 1,500 people. Our oldest child, Sora, attends the local public

elementary school during the week. Sam, our son, goes to a local preschool three days a week (MWF), and is with his grandparents on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Both children attend Japanese Saturday school on the weekends.

The children mainly speak Japanese with me and English with everyone else: my husband, their grandparents, and the rest of the family (aunts, uncles, cousins) in the area. On Saturdays at Japanese school, we are not allowed to speak English, so we speak Japanese only.

1. Our Japanese school:

Our program is located in Pepper Pike, Ohio, and housed at the Lillian and Betty Ratner School. Sora’s class, 3rd grade, has fourteen students and meets for the whole day. The schedule is as follows:

**Morning meeting**  
**1<sup>st</sup> period: Japanese**  
**2<sup>nd</sup>: Japanese**  
**3<sup>rd</sup>: Math**  
**Noon Recess:**  
**Gym/Lunch**  
**4<sup>th</sup>: Math**  
**5<sup>th</sup>: Math**  
**6<sup>th</sup>: Japanese**  
**“End-of-the-Day” Meeting**

朝の会		8 : 5 0 ~ 9 : 0 0
一時間目	国語	9 : 0 0 ~ 9 : 4 5
二時間目	国語	9 : 5 0 ~ 1 0 : 3 5
三時間目	算数	1 0 : 4 0 ~ 1 1 : 2 5
昼休み	ジム	1 1 : 2 5 ~ 1 1 : 4 5
	昼食	1 1 : 4 5 ~ 1 2 : 1 0
四時間目	算数	1 2 : 1 5 ~ 1 3 : 0 0
五時間目	算数	1 3 : 0 5 ~ 1 3 : 5 0
六時間目	国語	1 3 : 5 5 ~ 1 4 : 4 0
帰りの会		1 4 : 4 0 ~ 1 4 : 5 0

Sam is in the kindergarten program, which

meets for a half-day on Saturday mornings. That curriculum basically involves reading, playing outside, and crafts. I have been co-teaching the Saturday morning kindergarten classes since Sora started the program. Both children have been attending since they were three years old.

2. Homework/additional time spent studying Japanese:

Outside of the Saturday school classes, the majority of other time spent studying Japanese is for homework. Sora’s is about 30 minutes to one hour, 3-4 times per week. Sam does not have homework yet.

3. Other resources:

In addition to the basic textbooks used for school, other resources have included: web research, keeping a picture journal (e-nikki), and NHK World (when Sora was younger). We don’t do 通信教育 (correspondence education). My husband and in-laws are very supportive about Japanese school, which is mental support for me. My parents in Japan occasionally talk with my kids on the phone.

4. Resources that work well:

At this point, for Sora, his homework is what is the most effective for learning. In saying that, though, since 2nd grade, she has been having trouble remembering kanji and is overwhelmed. We have tried using an application for the iPad for kanji that follows the Japanese textbook. The app is called 光村 図書版 小学3年生. It was about \$5. After studying kanji on the drill, you can play a little and practice writing. She doesn’t do it anymore because all she has time for now is homework. The amount of homework is increasing in the 3rd grade; usually 3-5 pages both of Math and Japanese language. Many other people at the school use “Z-Kai” (Z会,

海外子女振興財団の通信教育). With this, they can study at their own pace and the teachers check their homework very neatly.

Finally, Japanese TV shows have definitely helped them to learn Japanese culture, but not the language so much. Candy Land was a very effective game to teach colors. Sam remembered the colors in a couple of days.

#### 5. Level check:

Sora has basic communication skills in conversation (BICS), but the academic materials are very challenging for her to understand. If I read it for her, she can understand and solve the problems. Reading is getting hard because there are too many kanji and it overwhelms her. Her test scores are always 40% -70%. Mainly, the Japanese School of Cleveland is for kids to eventually go back to Japan. We follow exactly the same schedule as Japanese schools in Japan. These tests are provided by Monbusho, meaning Japanese students in Japan are taking the exact same tests. Since we have no plan to go back to school in Japan, the contents of school are too difficult to keep up with. I send Sora to school not to get 100% on tests, but rather for social factors such as hanging out with Japanese friends or other events like 運動会、学芸会、and ファンフェア。 Sam doesn't talk in Japanese, but he understands Japanese and follows directions.

At Sam's age, Sora had already been to Japan three times. Sam has never been to Japan. Therefore, there is a big difference already between Sora and Sam's Japanese conversation skills.

#### 6. Motivation:

As a result of the amount of kanji to remember and being overwhelmed by that, Sora has become extremely demotivated. She feels that she can't do well, even when she

tries hard. Conversely, at her local American school, she basically doesn't have to try hard at all and can still do well!

Personally speaking, I have become very passive because she wants to quit Japanese school. I cannot let her give up yet, because I haven't asked 100% of her. The most important thing, I think, is to keep trying. I'm not really doing well in "teaching" her Japanese, but I think it is the same for a lot of the other Japanese moms. The biggest difference in motivation between our family and others is that many of them return to Japan at least once a year (mid-June) and attend school (体験入学) for four weeks or so, which we cannot do. So, in my opinion, the main thing we can do at this point is to keep doing the homework.