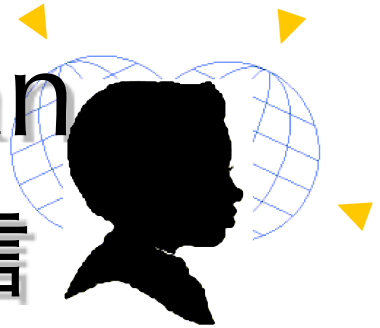


Bilingual Japan

バイリンガル通信



Winter 2018/2019 • Volume 27, Number 3

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: April 15th

Coordinator's Message

Dear Bilingualism SIG Members!

Hope all of you have been enjoying a winter break. We would like to thank BSIG Officers (<https://www.bsig.org/officers>) along with all our regular members who have been contributing to the SIG successful activities via long-term membership, presenting and sharing their research and lived experiences at the PanSIG and JALT Bilingualism SIG Forums, and SIG events related to bi-/multilingualism and bi-/multiculturalism, submitting articles and book reviews to the SIG's newsletter and the JJMM Journal, and other various contributions.

Thank you very much to all participants who kindly accepted an invitation to participate in the BSIG Forum at the PanSIG and JALT International Conferences. It is always a pleasure to meet with all of you in person and learn from each other during such events. We look forward to see you all at the upcoming PanSIG 2019 Conference which will be held at Konan University, CUBE Campus in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, on May 18-19, 2019.

I hope you will enjoy reading the Newsletter (winter issue) where you will find contributions from Spiri John, Lance Stulp, and Elena McAulay whose stories are rather helpful and interesting to the BSIG audience. Thank you very much to all contributors who have expressed an interest in submitting their work to the BSIG Newsletter.

While the SIG has sent out 3 issues of newsletter for many years, we would like to announce of the decision related to the discontinuation of the paper version which had been reached at the BSIG Annual General Meeting of 2018 at the JALT Conference. It was agreed that the budget, usually spent on printing and distributing the newsletter, would benefit BSIG members if it is used for organizing events and/or sponsoring guest or speakers relevant to the BSIG members' interests. The newsletter issues will be provided to all members in a different format which would be available in the e-version with an easy access.

On a different note, we would like to remind you of the call for papers for the BSIG JJMM 25th Anniversary Issue: Submissions are now being accepted for Volume 25 of the Japan Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism, which will be released in November, 2019 (<https://www.bsig.org/callforpapers>).

We are constantly looking for new members to join our Decision-Making Team (SIG Officers). Please send your suggestions, questions and proposals related to the BSIG events and activities at alexshaitan@yahoo.com to Shaitan Alexandra. Our team provides support and guidance to new members along with the JALT executive officers. We are now looking for an individual who would like to be involved in 'shadowing' our SIG Coordinator to ensure a smooth transition once the current coordinator's term has finished.

We thank you all for your support and look forward to hearing from you.
Best wishes,

Alexandra Shaitan, BSIG Coordinator.

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> for more information.

HAFU Film: Reflections on Diversity in Japan

by Lance Stilp

JALT 2018 Diversity & Inclusion

Presentation Title: Diversity Misconceptions in the English Classroom

This is part 2 of a research series, which was published in the WINTER 2016/2017 issue. The following are responses from Japanese students on diversity and multiculturalism in Japan.

Preface

In 2012, I moved to Japan and realized that I had two big interests: one of course was the studies I had gone through as an applied linguist; the study of languages, how they are learned, used, and contested over in numerous ways. In other words, it was the study of how people eventually become bilingual (or multilingual). I was also interested what it meant to be bilingual; in other words, the study of how people live their lives with multiple languages and cultures. Thanks to members of the BSIG group, I was able to hit the ground running at my first JALT appearance in 2012. I attended the film showing of “HAFU”, which at the time, had just been released into mainstream society. (It had had various viewings all over the world prior, but it was the first time anyone could pick up the DVD and watch it from anywhere in the world.)

Watching that film made me realize two things: first, that maybe being bilingual can be extremely difficult and demanding on the individuals; and second, that this was a film that was something that everyone should watch, regardless of their own ethnic

background. It is not a film simply reserved for those who grow up HAFU, or for those parents who are planning to raise children in Japan. In fact, it might be a film that is intended to teach Japanese about the issues of HAFU in Japan, just as much as it is a commemoration to those who also grew up with the same difficulties.

Therefore, as a university teacher, I decided to begin my project, in which I would show the film to as many Japanese people as possible in the hopes of spreading the word of a changing Japan. This included my family and friends, who immediately took heart to the content. I also intended to show the film to my own students. By doing so, I could reach out to hundreds of Japanese and show them the various issues that half-Japanese / mixed race people have living in Japan. It was me, leading the charge to change the minds of all these “monocultural” and “pure” Japanese.

However, the more I showed the film to students, the more I realized that I had made a mistake. It was not them who started to change, but rather it was my own opinions of them, the students who I intended to bring diversity to. I slowly realized the potential for diversity within the Japanese themselves as I began to collect responses and interview students after they had watched the film. It was my own mistake to assume from the beginning that Japanese were not diverse or didn't believe in diversity. Through my own misconception, my project began to grow as I expanded it to include not just the video showing in my class, but also large-scale projects that would involve students in

firsthand research to identify other social issues in Japan and learn about diversity and multiculturalism in their everyday lives.

The biggest misconception that I had was believing that my Japanese “domestic” students were in fact all Japanese themselves. Among domestic students, a portion of them actually do come from various national, ethnic, and/or linguistic backgrounds. They may have mixed roots, either linguistically, culturally, or both. Then, there are also those who have simply traveled extensively, lived abroad for a time, or have some other international experience. I realized that there was no indication of a student’s true diversity until I probed deep into each student’s unique situation.

The following sections contain some quotes and comments regarding students’ own beliefs on the language, culture, and identity of a rapidly changing Japan. Over 100 students were surveyed over the course of four years. Students were asked to watch a documentary in class and research about a particular social issue they found interesting. Each of the excerpts was selected after coding the themes, summarized below:

- 1) Specify the objectives of the research
- 2) Read the text of the data twice
- 3) Select coding unit such as the line of text
- 4) Organize and group the units into codes, and then organize codes into different categories
- 5) Identify themes of the categories
- 6) Select excerpts of the data that represent the themes

**Adapted from Auerbach and Silverstein 2003*

This selection of responses is part of a larger, ongoing ethnographic research project. The responses selected are meant to be representative of common threads found: surprised/shock, tolerance/change, and understanding/repositioning.

Excerpts:

Layer 1: Surprise and Shock “Do you believe Japan is changing?”

“There are so many international families [these days].”

“There are more people [that] have the mixed heritage and they make the Japanese's thoughts more global.”

“A decade ago, I rarely saw people from other countries traveling, living and moving in my hometown.”

“It was the first time to know Japanese are not tolerant to HAFU.”

“I was very surprised at watch this video, because I never concerned about my nationality or blood.”

“I think that HAFU think too much about their ethnic groups. Also their opinions were very negative.”

Layer 2: Tolerance and Change

“Japanese think we have to speak English more than now. This is start of changing.”

“I [heard] my mother's experience of exchange student. In that time study in abroad is not usual.”

“In recent years more and more people go and study in abroad.”

“In my case, I didn't have any [half-Japanese] friends in my class until coming [to university].”

“There are [actually] few places where foreigners can work in Japan.”

“Japan is becoming global, but our knowledge is so little.”

“We should broaden our horizon.”

“The context of Japan might be not comfortable for HAFU to live normally.”

Layer 3: Understanding, Inspiration and Repositioning

“I think that Japan should change to be flexible, but that Japanese make the wall between us and foreigner [so] Japanese culture [is] protected.”

“To change the way to think of mixed race, Japanese should have education to accept the differences since they are young. But I personally think they have had lack of these kind of systems so far.”

“I didn't know that mixed roots people are feeling difficult about their identity...I think they should be proud of being themselves, but I assumed that they can speak more than one language easily and can know about both country automatically. Now I found that assumption was wrong and even if they can speak many languages and know many cultures, it is because they've gone through many challenges.”

「ハーフの人達はそれぞれのアイデンティティを困っていると思わなかった。彼らはもっと自分のことを自慢していいと思っている。両方の国のことを知っているし、両方の言語を話せることが全て当たり前なことだと思っていた。しかし、色々な経験や、色々な辛いことがあったからこそ、両方の言語や、文化を知っている。」

“I understood that Japanese society makes some people uncomfortable... Japan is trying many things for the world now, so Japan should welcome to the concept of international. Of course, Japanese identity and old ideas from ancestor should also be

respected. Japanese have responsibility for accepting and understanding many values as a world leading country.”

「HAFUの人達には日本はまだまだ住みにくいところだと思う。日本はたくさんインターナショナルなことを試しているが、もちろん、日本の歴史や文化をも大事した方がいいと思うし、私たちも色々な国の人達の考え方があるから、それを理解し受け入れないといけないと思う。」

“I wanted to become a HAFU, because I can learn and touch diversity...I could not easily learn about diversity before. I think understanding diversity is necessary to live in the world.”

“I have many HAFU friends, so I thought I knew about HAFU, but it was wrong. I learned that they had different backgrounds... Compared to other countries, HAFU would be uncommon in Japan, so I want more people to watch the video and know about HAFU. Then Japan would be a comfortable county to live in for HAFU.”

“When I was an elementary school student, I was bullied [because of being "HAFU"]. I really hated myself and I was scared of talking with people. But by seeing this video, I learned that there are lots of people thinking about the same thing. And I felt that I should change myself. I want to live more positive, and I want to help people who are suffering from similar things in Japan.”

「私はハーフのなので、小学生の時にいじめられていた。自分の事が嫌いだったし、怖くて他の人達と話す事ができなかった。でも、このドキュメンタリーを見て、他のHAFUの人達も同じ思いをしている事に気づいた。自分自身が変わら

なきやいけないと思うし、もっと前向きに生きたい、そして同じ思いをしているHAFUの人達の手助けをしたい。」

“People who have the mixed heritage are more than the past in Japan. They had the experience about the culture shock or something and I have some similar experience. I understand these people and I have the thought about two cultures, too. In this video, they have many situations. And know how they bridged it. It makes [gives] me courage. And I want to try doing something that the 'HAFU' can do.”

Commentary & Analysis

Layer 1, perhaps unsurprisingly, reveals the initial reactions for most Japanese who watch the film for the first time: surprise and/or shock. Visible changes in Japan, such as more international families moving or traveling, is easily identified by most. However, the idea that these people would have some difficulties living in Japan is quite surprising to most. For most Japanese, their own identity itself is not an issue, because they've never had to face those situations in society when their culture, tradition, language, ideas, or values are being contested. By showing them the video, students open up and realize that having mixed roots is not as glorious as it seems to appear on TV or in the media. They are also surprised to learn that HAFU don't acquire languages based on their own heritage. Language learning is not automatic, and they realize that Japanese people might struggle just as much as those with mixed roots do.

In Layer 2, many Japanese students realize the need for Japan to change and become more open and diverse. Yet at the same time, they struggle to identify and hold on to their core Japanese values and traditions. Being able to navigate between their own national and international identities is one that many

people with mixed roots do on a daily basis. People are not bound to one idea, one culture, one language, or even one attitude, and they often go back and forth between various national and international identities and/or perspectives. Many understand the importance of Japan changing itself, as well as the importance of changing themselves. This could mean learning a new language, studying abroad, or becoming more open to change in their everyday lives in Japan.

Finally, in Layer 3, students begin the process of comparing themselves with a symbol of diversity, such as HAFU. Some students take a negative attitude towards themselves, or feel a sense of regret, and how they feel they should think about diversity more. However, this is an important step forward, and a possible difference in how the generation of Japanese growing up today is different than previous ones. The fact that they realize this difference shows that they do in fact understand the importance of diversity. One major step for students is to realize the difference between their own culture and values and that of others. That, I think, is one of the biggest steps in becoming a part of a larger global movement. Also, it gives them reason to actively participate and engage in English and see the value in languages as a whole. In a symbolic sense, they become inspired to take a risk and reposition themselves in a discussion on diversity, rather than simply standing on the sidelines of it.

“Diversity” in the Classroom

Educators need to consider diversity in the classroom as the understanding and positioning of language, culture, and/or identity as a part of something larger than ourselves. Too often, we stifle students and place labels on them. If we simply define diversity as something innate, i.e., something people are born with, then no, most Japanese could not be defined as “diverse” in that strict sense. However, that strict definition is not

useful for most Japanese who can and often do express diverse perspectives.

Therefore, educators should provide an environment that can adapt and allow for a multicultural sense of identity in students to flourish. Diversity can be uncovered even within the most homogenous classroom environments. If students don't believe in their own diversity, how can they identify with a larger narrative of globalization in which they are expected to play a role in making an impact in today's world? Without a proper understanding of one's own diversity, all the rhetoric to create a global-minded Japan remains unrelatable and lost on most Japanese students as they remain unconnected and cannot connect themselves to grandiose ideas of "multiculturalism." I have a few recommendations for other educators who wish to discuss diversity and multiculturalism in their own classrooms:

1. Uncover the existing environment and avoid making assumptions regarding culture

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-bunkyo cho, Matsuyama, 790-8577. t: 089-927-9358 email: 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

Hong Kong University Academy for the Talented: STEM Symposium

by Elena McAulay

I am 17 years old, a second-year high school student, born and raised in Japan, with a Japanese mother and Scottish father. My parents raised me bilingually using one-parent-one-language. I am a fairly balanced bilingual. I am native in Japanese, and possess Level 1 of the STEP (Eiken) test, have a TOEIC score of 980. In July 2018 I scored 105 on the TOEFL iBT. All of my formal education has been at state schools in

or values

2. Give students opportunities to explore their identity or values in a context relevant to them
3. Promote a sense of belonging to a larger global narrative through the use of social issues and relevant topics
4. Include large task-based projects to enhance learning

In this project, I have tried to open up a discussion that considers individuals as diverse beings themselves in an attempt to close the gap between idealism and reality. I would like to continue to promote multiculturalism and diversity in the Japanese classroom.

References

Auerbach, C. F. and Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*, New York, New York University Press.

Japan. I did have one year at Scottish primary school when my father had a sabbatical, from April 2011 to March 2012. I was 10 years old. I have also had short summer sojourns at Scottish school. I attend a state high school in Yokohama, one of the government's Super Global English High Schools. Through my high school, I was given the opportunity to apply to a STEM Symposium organised by Hong Kong University's Academy for the

Talented. According to their website, they provide “a platform for outstanding students to pursue intellectual enhancement and productive academic learning.” As a Japanese-English bilingual, I decided to explore this opportunity. Here, I relate my experiences and encourage other bilingual high school students in Japan to consider HKU’s Academy for the Talented to enhance their multicultural development.

In summer of 2017, I applied for and was accepted for a symposium on STEM education at Hong Kong University (HKU). STEM stands for the academic subjects science, technology engineering and mathematics. One hundred high school students from all over the world attended the symposium.

On July 27th, we arrived at the airport at around lunch time, and were greeted by three HKU staff members. They directed us to the airport express that took us directly to Hong Kong Station. There were staff members at the station as well, and they organized a taxi journey for us and two other Academy members. We arrived at a dorm inside HKU where another staff member was waiting for us. I could feel butterflies in my stomach when the woman told me that I was to go to a different dorm from the three that were in the same taxi as me. Across the street was my dorm, which felt like miles away. Regardless of my worries, I met Bonnie, who was my supervisor for the trip, and I soon felt very relaxed. My room was on the 11th floor and the view was amazing. I had the room all to myself and felt a little lonely.

That afternoon, we were called to an orientation meeting at the main building. We were put into groups of eight, and had a chance to talk about our presentation that was planned on the last day of the symposium. My group consisted of two girls from Hong Kong, two boys from mainland China, and one boy each from from the U.K. and

Thailand. My group consisted of seven members due to the fact that a girl from India had withdrawn at the last minute. After that, we were given certificates to commemorate entering the Academy for the Talented. That was the end of the first day. We gathered again at 9:00 the next day to register at the main building.

Day Two started with all 100 high school students from all around the world in one hall. Our very first talk was by an industry manager from Google, the CEO of 9GAG, and the head of growth from Snapask. I was amazed at the talks they gave about IT and business. There were around 10 minutes for questions after the talk, and that was when I was taken aback by the amount of questions, and the high-level of the questions, that the students were asking. I was used to “question times” in Japan where no one asks questions, and even if they do, it was something that was off the point. It made me concentrate more on the next talk, which was on data analysis and mathematical modelling, and I tried to understand harder what the speakers were trying to say.

In the afternoon we had a chance to visit a company called ASTRI. The CEO himself gave us welcoming remarks, and we were delighted to see that he was happy to see us all. ASTRI urged us to “become creators rather than mere consumers.” It was something that had never occurred to me, and was very new. ASTRI made me think from a whole new perspective.

After a fun dinner with the local HKU students, our group was ready to work on our presentation. We had decided to present on Pavegen tiles. The curfew was twelve o’clock and we were eager to get it at least half-finished. Our group leader was very kind to us, and got us takeout food from a nearby restaurant. I remember being very tired at the time, but it is all a good memory now.

The third day, July 29th, was all about listening to speeches and actually thinking about what they were trying to tell us. The most memorable speech for me was the one that was made by Mr. Kajimoto, a Japanese professor at HKU. He talked about how technology is influencing information flow in the present age and how we should make informed choices when information is overwhelming online. It made an impact not only because the speaker was Japanese, but also because the content was very easy to understand, as it was 'literature' based. Even I, a non-science major student, could understand it. I went up to talk to him after his speech, and he seemed delighted to see a Japanese high school student at HKU. We talked in Japanese about media and journalism. I also asked him about campus life at HKU.

That afternoon we had a game session. It was not an ordinary game, but a game where we had to cooperate with our team members to solve problems. In the problem-solving game, my teammates and I had to communicate quickly and precisely. We had to explain details in English while being pressured under a limited time. This was challenging for us because most of us used English as a second language. While playing the game, I tried hard not to let any Japanese slip out. We used computers to play the game, and I got to know my group members much better than I did the day before. We had dinner at a local Chinese restaurant, and worked hard on our presentations afterwards.

The last day had come, and we were all in formal wear. All of the groups had their

presentations ready. My group was first, and I was very nervous. It was a ten-minute presentation. We talked about Pavegen tiles and how they would be a great way to produce sustainable energy. There was also a question time for our presentation, and many students asked us about the tiles and how the system could be funded. I was very relieved once our presentation was finished, and was ready to listen to all the other groups' presentations. The presentations finished around four o'clock. We were all satisfied with our work. The HKU teachers told us that they had prepared a barbecue for us, and we hopped on a bus to go to the location, which was in a fairground near the beach. It was very sad saying goodbye to all the friends that I had made, but I knew that we would stay in touch and someday I would be able to see them again.

This experience at Hong Kong University changed the way I view the world dramatically. For all of the students there, it was an ordinary thing to be able to speak two or more languages. Coming to another country was an everyday thing for them too. But most importantly, they valued their own education and were eager to learn. I feel very privileged to have been able to join such enthusiastic learners, and that I was a part of a great program with the leaders of the new generation. I hope that I will be able to take this experience and utilize it in my life.

For more information on Hong Kong University's Academy for the Talented, see: <https://aal.hku.hk/talented/>



Spending Junior High School Years at Home in Japan

by John Spiri

In March 2015, my son Vincent graduated from a public elementary school in Japan. As noted in *Bilingual Japan's* 2005, No. 12 issue, Vince has always had strong linguistic skills, and was probably close to U.S. grade level in English, at least regarding speaking and listening, upon elementary school graduation. The next step in his academic career, however, concerned me.

Father's concern and influence

When I was in my early 20s, I discovered the teachings of the Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti. Although my main interest resided in his teachings regarding psychological liberation, I also became interested in his philosophy of education, and visited Krishnamurti's Oak Grove elementary school in California. Then and there, the principles of a liberal education all struck me as vastly superior to the stifling atmosphere of a public school. These principles included: giving students far more power to decide when, where and what to study, de-emphasizing exams, expanding the traditional curriculum to spend more time on crafts, environmental education, and harmonious and cooperative peer interactions, and providing an inspiring learning environment. As a result, I had a strong desire to steer Vincent into a school more aligned to my principles of learning. My main objection to Japanese public schools is their excessive focus on testing and entrance exams. Also, considering Vince's level of English, English classes in junior and senior high school would certainly have been boring and probably frustrating.

Finally, my wife Rika and I had always envisioned that both our sons would attend university abroad. We knew we'd be living in

Japan throughout their childhoods, so we hoped they would live abroad as adolescents so they could compare lifestyles before deciding where to seek employment and live. Four years abroad would also solidify and further their English skills.

Vincent's personality

From an early age, Vincent's experiences in the U.S. were very positive. He enjoyed my parents' and cousins' spacious home and pool, staying with friends in a cabin in Vermont, and traveling by car throughout the northeast. Watching American sitcoms on TV probably also contributed to a slightly idealized version of life in the U.S. and a desire to attend school in America.

In contrast, he expressed dislike for team sports and the structure of clubs in Japan after playing soccer as a fifth grader and being a boy scout from 4th through 6th grade. He also expressed a stronger and stronger dislike of uniforms. While Vincent had friendships, and never experienced any sort of bullying, a U.S. school seemed preferable. In fact, he had his heart set on it.

Vincent's interest in attending school in America was also, I think, because of his desire to minimize studying. He had an image—not altogether incorrect—that schools in the U.S. are easier than those in Japan. Studying kanji, for example, was an endeavor that he complained about and would spend minimal time doing. In general, he picked up the gist of school lessons easily, but rarely showed interest in spending more than the absolute minimum amount of time on them. His report cards were neither stellar nor poor. By sixth grade he probably identified more as an American than as Japanese, so we decided

to not make him enroll in a public junior high school in Japan. Next was the daunting task of finding an alternative.

Because of school calendar differences, he spent April to August of 2016 being home schooled. I mostly used my self-published EFL materials that were made for university students (see journal entries below for more on this). He studied English mainly by doing culture and geography activities. We read books about science as well, and I had Vince keep a journal.

My journal during Vince's three months of home schooling

After Vincent graduated from elementary school, I decided to keep a journal that would document aspects of his unique educational journey. My first journal entry appears on April 3, 2016. For the four-month period, there are a total of 18 entries that span nine full journal pages. While some of the early entries were quite short, they later typically took up a full page.

Wednesday, April 27

Vince is having a good week, studying hard. We started a popular science book, an excellent resource, introducing basic concepts and branches of science. Gorgeous photos and understandable, I think it's perfect. It's D.K. Science Encyclopedia. As noted before we also do my EFL text *Around the World*, doing dictations (easy) and reading comprehension (he's improving). Finally, we are keeping up with math.

Saturday, May 14, 2016, 2:50am

One concern is he appears to be getting soft. Now, I'm no macho dad, but he apparently spends way too much time on the sofa, sometimes even reading his schoolbooks while laying on his back. I gave advice about sitting up straight at a table, but he's ignoring... Stress is building on (Rika). Some of it, to me, is valid; the posture, for example. But some I

don't really get. He doesn't wash his plate after lunch; he vacuumed slipshod. I hadn't considered how much housework he should do and will have to deal with this issue.

Sunday, May 15

One thing I have noticed is that Vince has been really happy these past couple weeks. Really cheerful, playfully dancing, and even a bit more generous than usual. It's heartening.

Thursday May 18

(Summary of various notes) I noted the subjects he was doing initially: science (read encyclopedia), Koreans at Work, Nature Stories (listen/read), Khan Academy (for math), English vocabulary notebook, writing (Google Docs), Japanese (ヤクザな月), and Japanese vocabulary notebook.

Friday, May 20, 2016

Tomorrow will try to get him interested in woodworking on our land in Shiga.

Monday, June 6

Today it was far from stellar. First he complained about boredom—not a good sign. Later I discussed boredom and my impression that, fundamentally, everything between video games is perceived as boring. That's a problem... another problem was effort. He barely did an hour's worth of studying (I'm happy he can tell me honestly about even a lousy effort).

July 1, 2016

Have to often snuff Vincent's bad habits. Latest is his desire to watch TV during the day. No! Main complaint is lack of time putting into studying and lack of concentration. Learning seems to come pretty easy for Vince, so he's not used to grinding anything out.

Commentary on three months of homeschooling

Clearly, Vince didn't study particularly hard and had to deal with several home issues: getting along with his mother, posture, how to manage time, etc. Even so, one thing I wondered when studying seemed limited was, in contrast, how much would he have seriously studied had he been attending school? Not to be cynical about schooling in general, but I felt many of my concerns were largely invisible truths to a public school experience (i.e. kids spend much time daydreaming and learning relatively little). I wondered whether he was learning less than the average kid in public school. Regardless, the time home studying English provided him a certain degree of preparation for the English program at Oak Meadow.

Private school options

At first we had decided to have Vincent attend 7th grade from September 2016 at an international school 30 minutes north of our home by train. The travel and expense did seem daunting, but I had visited the school a couple of times and approved of their educational philosophy. But the day my entire family went to visit led us to rethink. They didn't interview my son and, in fact, barely talked to him; instead they gave him a 7th grade test – an entrance exam of sorts – something they had not even told me about. I was taken aback after having heard how they de-emphasized testing. Had they spoken with Vince they would have heard his fluent spoken English. However, having never taken a paper test in English, he performed poorly. I also didn't feel a connection with the 7th grade teacher, and felt the number of 7th grade students, 3 or 4, was too few. I was disappointed when I heard Vince was merely “conditionally accepted.” I understand the school's desire to only accept students who have sufficient capability in English, but felt the school dropped the ball by not interviewing Vincent, and worse, misrepresented itself regarding testing. By

failing to even tell me that they would administer an entrance exam on the day we visited, the school caused me to doubt their organizational capabilities.

Plan B was for Vince to study via an online school based in Vermont, U.S., Oak Meadow, which I had discovered via Google searches. Choosing this option would mean, for good and for bad, Vincent would not even leave the house. On the upside, the money saved could be put towards high school in the future. When offered both options, he chose to stay home and study via Oak Meadow rather than travel 30 minutes to the international school. My wife and I supplemented his homeschooling and later online schooling with outside tutoring, starting with Japanese and piano. Thus, in late spring 2016, we enrolled Vincent in Oak Meadow for 7th grade. We purchased all 7th grade level textbooks and he began submitting assignments via Google Docs.

Journal continuation: Vince's two years doing Oak Meadow assignments at home

These entries, a total of 23, began on September 20, 2016 and cover 30 pages. They continue to document Vincent's unique educational journey. The final entry was made on July 5, 2018, less than a month before Vincent moved to the United States.

September 20, 2016

We are getting Vince active; will join tennis after he approved the taiken (たいけん, trial) lesson, and he just restarted piano yesterday. And he's agreed to start French after a week or two. I'd like to get drawing and/or guitar in there too.

October 14, 2016

His habits still concern me. (Rika) caught him playing games—and he was erasing browser memory. When I said she saw him playing, he adamantly denied it... Anyway, I now take

away his laptop when I work. He still has access to the Apple. Strangely, he told me he was relieved to have it gone... I can't get him to do much with Japanese... One positive note—he's been watching Justin Guitar (on YouTube) with me and seems interested.

November 22, 2016

French – I've more or less given up... Japanese – not much happening here either, but I'm not giving up... Guitar— This is the big success.

December 18, 2016

English has taken on a more prominent role in Vince's life thanks to gaming. He coordinates with other kids—in Australia and the US—on Skype to play Minecraft. It's fun for him and provides an element of human interaction with other kids.

March 17, 2017

There has definitely been an uptick in Vince's effort doing schoolwork. He gets into assignments more deeply, asks more questions, and spends more time on them. Unfortunately, juku (塾, cram school)

ended as his tutor (who taught Vince Japanese and a little math) moved... And where is art? How I want him to do some drawing! But teaching yourself is hard.

June 20, 2017

Vince has his heart set on attending school in the U.S. Not Canada, not Europe, but the USA... Then I saw the deal on the Great Courses website: for like ¥17,000 a year you can access every course, with the first month free. (We joined and did a fair amount of drawing for a few months. But after watching about ten drawing lectures, we stopped and canceled the Great Courses subscription.)

November 28, 2017

As the months roll by, I feel less confident I made the right decision letting Vince study at home. He's been swallowed by the computer.

He doesn't seem to care about anything else. He can still be fun offline, a sweet kid, but it's as if he lives for a return to his virtual world, and everything else is an interruption – sometimes relatively pleasant, often distasteful. But he has learned to do his schoolwork independently.

January 9, 2018

Vince is putting the time in, but, to a certain extent at least, spinning his wheels. He sits for four hours tapping away at the keyboard but remains significantly behind... I want to do more with him, like Spanish. But that has ended. He kept fading until he started acting like a jerk (during the live Skype lesson). I mean, he kept walking away and wasn't really listening and was yawning. Was it too much? He certainly lost motivation. It was nice father-son time for a while.

March 8, 2018

Is the “great eschewing of public schools” proving itself a failure? I sometimes feel that. Vince sits all day at the computer, but completes work at a snail's pace... His posture is crap. And he's very lonely. I do try to put all this into perspective... There are no thoughts of extras save piano; no guitar, no Spanish, no Japanese, no carpentry, no sports; just me nagging to get on track to catch up.

May 15, 2018

Teacher suggested I work with him on civics assignments. The idea is he does one question well (out of 5-7 choices) and the others he just discusses with me. I agree that the assignments are excessive and sometimes tedious as the teacher alluded... I gave him an advanced PE activity last Friday: an overnight bicycle trip around Lake Biwa. Rode the 155 km! Really surprised me.

July 5, 2018

I'm sort of resigned to what we have, which is some effort, some learning, but nothing approaching “excel” or “excellent.” Just get through this phase. It has served a purpose; I

hope a worthy one... Despite occasional flare-ups/disagreements, we get along well. I want him beside me longer. But if he were in a normal situation we would have seen so much less of each other. (After he goes) holidays should be great. I already fantasize about the joy of seeing him again after an absence of a few months or nine months. Still, more than ever, I'm convinced that this is the best path for him. I might not have put him on the path of a scholar, but hopefully he can work on his own and thinks for himself (to a decent degree at this point).

Commentary on Vince's two years of online study at Oak Meadow

By the end of 2017, it became clear that Vince taking high school classes online via Oak Meadow was not a viable option; we all agreed the two years were a moderate success, but he needed to interact with peers again. While remaining cheerful and “up” for the most part, he was declaring loneliness in stronger terms. He occupied a corner of our living room, in front of the gaming computer he built from purchased parts, to a distressing degree. This concerned me mainly for his development, but also because my wife and I desired to, at least occasionally, have the living room to ourselves. Attending a Japanese high school was out of the question; that would make the 2.5 years studying English at home a waste and I didn't want it for him. Moreover, he adamantly opposed any thought of it. The international high schools in the city 30 minutes north of us seemed more geared for academically ambitious students and still had requirements such as uniforms.

Looking stateside, my sister kindly offered to host him while he attended a public high school in Utica, New York, but after the extra effort and expense of having Vince study at home, the thought of sending him to a public school in the U.S. was unappealing. Besides the aforementioned problems of an

overemphasis on test scores, we worried that social problems regarding drugs or violence could become challenges as well.

Although he spent 2.5 years separated from peers, the lack of socialization did not, apparently, affect his personality. When he had the chance to interact with similarly-aged kids, he did so easily and naturally. Also, he made several online friends. His schoolwork, as it was in elementary school, could be characterized as “just enough”, although he did do well in science. Besides receiving praise on the final Oak Meadow report, he began watching informative YouTube science videos aimed at teens. His English writing improved a lot, too. However, he didn't develop as a reader and particularly dislikes books, wanting instead to watch a video or even, he says, listen to an audio version. Results in math were even worse: he didn't complete Algebra.

Another reason not to pursue a more traditional education in the U.S. for Vince was that many U.S. private high schools seemed similarly focused on academically ambitious youth and geared to rich families, with tuitions in the range of \$50,000 annually. Of course I value academic ambition, but I was more concerned about his overall development as a person than his ability to score highly on exams. Becoming an entrepreneur seems a far likelier future outcome for him than attending a top-notch university.

Youth Initiative High School

Youth Initiative High School (YIHS) is a tiny private school in rural Wisconsin. I found YIHS by searching on Google for “cheapest private high school in U.S.” In 2015 they were awarded the status of a “Changemaker school” by Ashoka, an NGO that seeks to build communities and collaborates to transform institutions and cultures worldwide. Some unique features of YIHS's program are: required service work by students; a

beginning-of-school-year 5 day, 4 night camping trip on Lake Superior; and yearly “expeditions” wherein students might cycle 100 km or camp outside for a few nights during a Wisconsin winter. Like Waldorf and Montessori schools, which usually end with graduation from junior high school, YIHS also encourages drama and outdoor activities. Students are empowered by having the chance to make many important curricular decisions.

Vince’s transition to high school in Wisconsin has generally gone smoothly. However, he failed “Comedy and Tragedy” (basically a class on Romeo and Juliet) despite

demonstrating understanding of the material. Not following directions and apathy in class were major contributors. In other classes he has done well, and success in math prompts him to quip, “Of course. I am Asian.” His homestay, just 1 km from the school, is comfortable and he gets along well with his host mother. Only time will tell whether this path is best for him. I like to think his 2.5 years at home were the groundwork for him to experience four years at a U.S. high school with greater freedom and ample opportunities for personal growth as well as academic learning.

