



Bilingual Japan

バイリンガル通信

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Special Interest Group on Bilingualism

In this issue...

Coordinator's Message	4
Bilingual Case-Study	5
When the home language is neither Japanese nor English: An interview by Christie Provenzano	5
Bilingual Case Study: 4-6, The "Ready-to-Read Years" by Diane C. Obara	10
Kiwi Adventure: A Month as an 11-year-old International Student in New Zealand by Graham Mackenzie	15



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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 e18d1101@soka-u.jp

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: September 5th

Coordinator's Message

Dear Bilingualism SIG Members!

Hope this message finds you well despite the busiest time of the academic year! Firstly, we would like to thank BSIG Officers (<https://www.bsig.org/officers>) along with ALL our Special Interest Group members who have been contributing to the Bilingualism 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.

The Decision-Making Team (DMT) would like to express thanks to all participants who kindly accepted an invitation to participate in the BSIG Forums at the PanSIG 2019 and JALT 2019 International Conferences. It is always a pleasure to interact with each other in person and exchange knowledge and expertise on a variety of issues we might have. Our special thanks go to **Mandy Klein, BSIG Programme Chair**, who has been organizing BSIG Forums over the past couple of years. These events have been truly successful!

We would also like to thank **Stephen M. Ryan**, our Journal Editor who has worked hard on the BSIG JJMM 25th Anniversary Issue scheduled to be released in November, 2019.

We look forward to seeing you at the JALT 45th Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Exhibition aiming at promoting "Teacher Efficacy, Learner Agency" as its main blanket motto. The event is scheduled to take place at the WINC AICHI, Nagoya City, Aichi, Japan from **Friday, November 1, to Monday, November 4, 2019**. This year the BSIG AGM and the Forum have a joint 90-minute slot. We hope this scheduling would attract many individuals interested in joining both events. Please do check the JALT Programme schedule for the details related to the time and room location.

I hope you will enjoy reading the Newsletter (autumn issue) where you will find contributions from Christie Provenzano, Diane C. Obara, and Graham Mackenzie whose stories would surely kindle minds. I gather most of us could find some familiar experiences and/or observations raised in the articles. Thank you very much to all contributors who have expressed an interest in submitting their work to the BSIG Newsletter.

On a different note, we are constantly looking for new members to join our Decision-Making Team (SIG Officers). Please do send your suggestions, questions and proposals related to the BSIG events and activities to **Shaitan Alexandra at alexshaitan@yahoo.com**. Our team strives to provide support and guidance to novice DMT members as much as we can. 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,

Bilingualism SIG Coordinator,

Shaitan Alexandra.

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 your 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; or Alec McAulay, GSISS, Yokohama National University, Tokiwadai 79-3, Hodogaya-ku, Yokohama 240-8501 t: 045-339-3553 (w) email: tokyomcaulay@gmail.com

When the home language is neither Japanese nor English: An interview

by Christie Provenzano

The discussion around bilingualism in this newsletter most often centers on discussions of English/Japanese bilingualism. However, families in Japan who are raising their children to be bilingual come from a vast variety of linguistic backgrounds (see, for example, Christiaens [2014] from this column). Interested in the challenges facing non-Japanese parents in Japan whose mother tongue is NOT English, I sat down with a French-speaking Swiss couple whose son has lived most of his life in Japan. They shared some of their family's unique child-raising challenges, and how they are managing those challenges. (Please note that the names used here are pseudonyms, to allow for privacy.)

As with many Europeans, parents Marco and Dominique are themselves multilingual. Dominique is bilingual and biliterate in French and English, with more limited proficiency in German and Italian, as well as conversational Japanese and limited Japanese literacy. Marco, himself a Third Culture Kid (TCK), was born into a home where Italian and Swiss German were spoken, before acquiring native-level French starting at age 7 when his family immigrated to a French-speaking area in Switzerland. Marco is also bilingual and biliterate in English, and, like Dominique, has conversational Japanese and limited Japanese literacy.

The family moved to Japan when their son Davide was just three months old, in July 2009. Naturally, his parents continued to speak French at home, but Davide was soon immersed in Japanese when he began to spend three days a week

with a Japanese caregiver and her children. His exposure to Japanese increased from age one, when he started full time at a *hoikuen* (保育園, nursery school). Davide has always attended Japanese school and is now in grade 4 at 10 years, 5 months old.

Over time, with Davide spending so many hours per day in a majority-language environment, and as he became literate in Japanese, Marco and Dominique noticed him developing a natural preference for communicating, reading and writing in Japanese. It is the age old linguistic story of the children of immigrant families – the younger generation, deeply immersed in the majority language through education and life in the wider community and encountering the heritage language mostly only within the home, becomes more proficient in the majority language than the home language (while many

researchers have delved deep into this topic, a general discussion can be found in Baker and Wright [2017]).

In this column, many parents have written of their struggles to find adequate opportunities for their children to use and interact with others in English. This is despite the fact that English is by far the most-studied foreign language in this country. It is studied as a school subject, appears on high-stakes entrance exams and has spawned a huge industry of extracurricular study. For a family like Marco and Dominique's, where the home language is something other than Japanese or English, opportunities for their child to use that language meaningfully outside of the home on a regular basis are painfully scarce. Visits to the parents' home country can be helpful, but in Marco and Dominique's case, those opportunities have been somewhat limited – five or six times for two weeks each time since the family moved to Japan in 2009.

Even so, they have continued their efforts to support Davide in his French language development. Their home language continues to be French, with the parents insisting on reasonably correct pronunciation and grammar from Davide. Says Dominique on the topic, "French is hard this way, [but] I don't want him to come up with made-up pronunciation." Therefore, despite occasional eye-rolling on his part, they are quite strict with him about the language he produces. Other French-speaking opportunities are few and far between but, fortunately, the city where Davide's family lives does feature an Institut Français (<https://www.institutfrancais.jp/fr/>), so Davide has been able to take some classes there and interact in French with people other than his parents.

At the time of our interview, Dominique was still worried about Davide's oral production of French. One reason for her concern was that her good friend, a trained speech therapist and child psychologist, had visited Japan from Switzerland. After interacting with Davide, the friend noted speech production errors that seemed similar to errors produced by people with dyslexia. Despite that observation, no similar problems had arisen with any of Davide's language production (oral or written) in Japanese. By all accounts from Japanese teachers and friends, Davide's Japanese is native level in all four language skills.

Wondering if dyslexia was a possibility, I asked about Davide's French literacy and learned that like many parents in this column, Dominique and Marco have made efforts to encourage Davide's heritage-language literacy through homeschooling in the evenings two or three days a week. Both parents work with him on level-appropriate workbooks from Switzerland, and they have a large supply of French language books and magazines that they hope will catch his interest. While Davide has become a prodigious reader of Japanese, his parents reported that he had little interest in reading in French, regarding it as a chore, and would struggle with deciphering certain letters and letter combinations. As Dominique, Marco, and I talked, we wondered if it was possible for bilinguals to experience dyslexia in one language but not in the other, musing that it could be one possible explanation for Davide's difficulties reading in French when he had no similar problems in Japanese.

I looked into dyslexia and bilingualism and found some studies (Wydell & Butterworth, 1999; Butterworth & Tang, 2004 September 23) that suggest

it may, in fact, be possible for a bilingual person suffer dyslexia in just one language. Wydell and Butterworth (1999) found that their bilingual case study subject read Japanese *kanji* and *kana* at a very high level but suffered severe dyslexia in English. Interestingly, the difference in Japanese and English writing systems may be the key, as the brain seems to process *kanji*'s pictograms differently than the writing systems of western languages (Butterworth and Tang, 2004). There is, of course, debate about the "myth" that Japanese speakers do not suffer from dyslexia (Yamada, 2000); nevertheless, it is an interesting consideration to explore, particularly for families like Davide's.

Happily, the worries about dyslexia may have been a red herring: in a post-summer vacation follow-up chat with Dominique, she reported that Davide had made sudden, great strides in his French literacy during the summer, much to his parents' great delight. I asked her what she felt had made the difference for him, and it seems to have been a combination of factors. First, compared to previous years when Davide was engaged in school-related summer activities, this summer saw the family spending five full weeks together nearly every day. Furthermore, Dominique and Marco have been reading the Harry Potter series aloud in French with Davide for some time. He is very engaged in the story and, of course, enjoys spending that time with his parents, which is motivating in and of itself, but Dominique also noted that they recently added a motivational "carrot" for Davide. She says, "He'll get a Nintendo Switch for Christmas if he can read some pages of HP by himself, aloud, and easily by then." For a family that is otherwise very careful about screen time, this is, indeed, a big carrot.

Over and above that extrinsic, material motivation, though, his parents report that Davide feels great satisfaction in finally gaining some reading fluency in French. Dominique says, "He wants to read so much in French now, all those kid magazines I bought over the years, he's into them [at last]." Davide's newfound French literacy has also allowed him to read e-mail messages from family and friends in Switzerland on his own, which makes him feel very proud.

The intensive summer family time in French surely boosted Davide's French proficiency and motivation to improve. Furthermore, the intrinsic motivation that comes from finding a way to overcome a formerly insurmountable hurdle can be very powerful. It may also be that Davide's brain happened to flip the developmental "switch" that allowed him to take the next step in his French literacy. Whatever the reason, Dominique and Marco are hopeful that Davide's newfound enthusiasm for reading in French will have a domino effect on his other French language skills. They hope he will be more amenable to reading aloud in French, which will give them the opportunity to focus on pronunciation, and that the effect of extensive reading in French will naturally clarify grammatical points for him, leading to improved oral production. Dominique was also excited about the new doors to learning that are opening for Davide as he develops an interest in reading material from another culture, in another language. She and Marco are glad that he can be exposed to "new stories, new takes on things he knows, new stuff they don't talk about here".

Another interesting facet of my discussion with Dominique and Marco touched on cultural issues, particularly their experience as non-native English

speakers living in a country where the default language spoken to visibly non-Japanese people is English. For multilingual Dominique and Marco, that has not been a problem, but from the time he was a young child, Davide has had to learn to manage interactions with Japanese and non-Japanese alike who assume that the European child they see before them must surely speak English. Indeed, I remember first meeting Davide a few years ago and instinctively speaking English to him before realizing that, of course, it wasn't going to work. When I did so, I remember his reaction was to look at Marco with an expression that wordlessly but unmistakably said, "Dad, it's happening again..." Realizing my mistake, I quickly switched to Japanese and things were fine from there. These days, his parents report that he can confidently manage such interactions himself and does not hesitate to correct people.

In imagining where Davide's linguistic path will take him in the future, his parents note that English classes at school will begin in earnest for him next year. Interestingly, his developing French literacy has already given him an advantage over his monolingual classmates in their introductory English activities because he has a good understanding of the alphabet and the sounds associated with various roman letters in French. Of course, French phonetics are rather different to English, but the similarities between the writing and phonetic systems of the two western languages are enough that his understanding of French can support his acquisition of English in a practical way. Furthermore, research shows that early bilinguals – that is, people bilingual from birth or from early childhood – can learn additional languages faster and more easily

than monolinguals (Grey et al., 2018). This may be a deeper cognitive reason why Davide is managing introductory English concepts easily.

Dominique and Marco acknowledge that in the context of Japan it may well turn out that Davide will eventually become more proficient in English than French, given the high-profile English has in this country, its prominence and importance in education and the pressure of social expectations that Davide will continue to face as a visible minority in Japan. In that respect, he may even be motivated to learn English out of self-preservation. I asked his parents how they might feel about that – the home language potentially taking a backseat to Japanese and English – and they both answered quite pragmatically, saying they are fine with that if it works out that way. Most of all, like all parents, Dominique and Marco want to raise their son to be happy, to have good friends, and to be secure and confident. As an outside observer, I can say that they're already well on their way.

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Bilingual Case Study: 4-6, The “Ready-to-Read Years”

by Diane C. Obara

In April 2018, my oldest son entered first grade at our local Japanese public elementary school. Like most families raising bilingual children, this event was somewhat of a finish line/goal, and also a turning point, in regard to our approach to literacy, time management, and which language would take precedence. With this in mind, from both the research my family had done, as well as advice from other families and friends, we have done our best to focus as much as possible on English literacy during this three to six-year-old period, and so, I will call this time the “ready-to-read” years.

There are now five people in our family. I am American (NES), with basic communication skills in Japanese, and have worked at Japanese universities for the past thirteen years. My husband is Japanese, with the last academic tests he took having a score of 850 on the TOEIC and having passed Eiken level Pre-1. My three children M (boy), R (girl), and E (boy) are the ages of 7;2, 5;10, and 1;2, respectively. I would personally claim that the older two are fairly balanced in terms of bilingualism and biliteracy. The youngest one, we have yet to tell. We live in a busy “bed-town” in Chiba of approximately 15,000 residents, that is home to the most populated elementary school in the prefecture. In previous articles I have written (Case Study, Winter 2015; v. 23, 3; Case Study, Spring 2016; v.25,1), the stories were only about my son, M, who is now in first grade. A little over a year ago, however, my third child E was born, and so his addition to our family has added a new dimension to our lives, which I am sure will come up later.

Throughout the past three years, our family has predominantly maintained the minority language at home approach, although there are of course exceptions to the rule, such as when grandparents come to visit and when we are hanging out with international friends. With this, despite the fact that my children have attended our local *hoikuen* (preschool) since the time

they were at least six months old, I would say that they were still English dominant in regard to speaking before we began to attack literacy, at around three years old. The combination of media control in the house, mom-child classes, and visits with close relatives, which I have also written about in previous articles, brought them up to that point.

“*Ready to Read*”:

Beginning with my first child, M, I consulted a lot of educator friends and did a great deal of research regarding how to approach this “ready to read” stage. There were two main points that I came across and continuously kept in mind. First, that this pre-reading stage actually takes about two years of work in preparing children to read on their own. This involves loads of phonics and readers and worksheets. Secondly, that for children who are planning on attending a local Japanese school, it is best to cram as much English in as possible, because once they start elementary school, the Japanese will begin to take over.

With M we tried several approaches. I initially started teaching twice a month mom-child classes with local *hoikuen* moms at my house following a home-school reading curriculum called “Five-in-a-Row.” After a couple of seasons of that, I realized M was progressing more rapidly than the others,

and so it seemed time that he should be studying with other native English speakers. We tried a Saturday afternoon program at an international preschool in Tokyo that used Jolly Phonics and was taught by native speakers. He enjoyed this, and the teachers, but again, his speaking was so much higher than the other students and there was a lot of inconsistency with the program, and so it turned out to be more of a positive experience and having fun at the lesson, rather than helping to improve his reading skills. At five years old, I again reached out to the same local moms in my community who participated in the initial mom-child reading circle. I decided that teaching once a week to that group, as long as it remained consistent, and I could control the curriculum, would be better than any other option in terms of steady growth. The classes have been holistic, with an emphasis on literacy and culture. Exactly around the start of that, at five years old, was when something also “clicked” cognitively for M, and his reading started to take off - in terms of sight words and advanced phonics. Even though his local friends in the class naturally didn't have the same amount of vocabulary and input that he did, they were still able to learn how to read the Scholastic and Jolly Phonics readers by the end of kindergarten, so I would say it was a success. Unquestionably, this was the most effective strategy for improving his literacy during these years. Even though he was a much higher level than his friends, he was learning so much more than what was in the lessons. The executive functioning and global processing of running the classes, communicating with the moms, designing the lessons, and planning the curriculum are what my kids learned the most from - more than what went on in the classroom. In the lessons, they often ended up being more like assistants, since they would help their friends, and learn from that, too. It is amazing how the result of this has not only been reading at grade level (for M) before

starting elementary school, but all of the other critical thinking skills and learning strategies, which have been great preparation that have transferred to learning in elementary school. Looking back on it now, I actually wonder how he could have survived the beginning of first grade without having had this early intervention, since he never attended a *youchien*. Even small tasks like being able to hold a pencil correctly greatly helped the transition.

Studying at home with worksheets and textbooks would never have worked with M in the beginning. He is a social learner, who loves to play and talk to his friends. He enjoys Math and games and solving problems and “challenges.” He loves music and listening to other people read. Looking back on this time, I questioned whether or not he had mild dyslexia, because he was constantly mirroring his “s”s, “b”s, and “d”s when he would write. However, from around six years old, he finally stopped doing it, so I feel like he just needed to personally recognize it, self-correct, and outgrow it. Plus, as a mother, I was physically attentive to it, and learning with him quite a lot. Now it doesn't seem to be a problem, but we definitely had to work at it and talk about it.

In addition, through learning with his local friends, he has been able to explain things to them in Japanese that they don't understand. It is such a great strategy, because they help each other at school too. And with writing, when I ask a question such as “Where are the birds?” and his friends can only write “in the sky,” M can still write at his own level in complete sentences, “They're in the sky.” For now, it has been easy to individually adjust to his level. Only occasionally do I independently work on other worksheets for grammar and writing with him.

With my daughter, R, however, our approach has naturally evolved in a different direction. Being fifteen months younger than M, she is close enough in age to participate in what he is doing, but not quite old enough to always understand it. In addition, she has a different personality and learning style. Quite simply, she is more independently driven and self-motivated. She always wants to know what he is doing and do it too. I often hear, “Not fair, M gets to do _____.” She will pull out workbooks to trace letters or color on her own. While both of the kids like the planning stages of different lessons, especially for the holidays, R will be the one to actually consistently follow through in helping to prepare and organize. This is a blessing and a curse, since in the class, she often wants to take on the role of the teacher.

R’s classes with local friends have taken a different direction as well. With her grade level, we were not able to create the same kind of group dynamic among the working moms of her friends who had been coming during her “nen-chu” (4-year-old class) year. Quite simply, this group didn’t have the same interest and motivation in studying English so intensively during the final year of kindergarten. As a result, her class has continued, but this year it has been with girls who are already in 1st grade with M and can come over after elementary school. This has been good, because she gets along well with the older girls and can feel a little more challenged, rather than bored (which was causing disruption!). Presently, we are now entering this “golden period” for pre-reading, during this last six months of her time at the *hoikuen*, when she is definitely ready for more intensive formal learning and getting somewhat bored with kindergarten. My goal will be the same for her: to have her reading and understanding age-appropriate workbooks, such as “BrainQuest” and

“Scholastic”, by the time 1st grade starts in April.

Ultimately, for R, it has been more of a balancing act behaviorally. On the one hand, she can get frustrated and become negative when she can’t understand how to do something that she wants to try; yet on the other hand, if we try to adjust the level to meet the needs of the other local students in the class, she can become disruptive because the lessons are too easy and she is bored. She also likes to play with the language. If she doesn’t understand something, then she makes a joke out of it. M is much better at direct translating. For example, when I ask R to explain something to her *hoikuen* teachers, she sometimes thinks about it and throws in her own ideas. Quite honestly, if we manage to keep these community classes running for a couple more years, I am personally looking forward to moving past all of these beginning stages, and working on more complicated service-learning projects, such as making bilingual school newspapers and video feature stories. Those will be the creative projects that will keep everyone engaged, and as long as the content remains interesting, we can keep motivation high. In addition, one final issue with her class seems to be that some of the parents are so impressed with how much their children already know, that they are not quite as interested in constantly improving. They think their children are good enough now at English, and want to try out something new, like piano or swimming. They are satisfied with the level that their children have achieved before elementary school, and are ready to try something else, rather than constantly improve.

Other than Literacy:

Because the community classes are once a week (only 1 hour!) and focus on literacy, there has not really been a need to focus intentionally on any particular speaking and listening activities.

Naturally, speaking and listening skills improve because we are working on these classes together. As a result, I can say that my media control within the house has become rather relaxed and unregulated. When they were younger, I remember intentionally having on more educational programs, such as “Daniel Tiger” or “Sesame Street.” Within the past two years, there’s probably been too many hours of watching other people play “Roblox” and “Minecraft” on YouTube, “Disney Descendants” music videos, and princess make-up tutorials. But as long as it is in English, I feel like it is better than nothing, considering the fact that I make them work so hard at other times. It is self-directed, and they enjoy it. As to be expected, though, it does have to be somewhat monitored for when YouTube starts to predict inappropriate material that is violent or has too much adult content. I have spoken to them enough times about that now that they seem to be able to self-regulate and avoid it. With books, we still read to them at night in English, and when the grandparents are visiting, in Japanese.

In general, they still seem to play together in English in the house, since most of the games and songs are ones that I have introduced to them in that way. After a long trip back to the U.S. for a month, the playing in English together, and when they are playing alone with toy figures and dolls, is especially strong. As for playing in Japanese, it is mainly at school and at parks with other Japanese children.

With music and movies, it is almost all in English, except for rare occasions when we are driving and watching TV, or staying at their grandparents’ house in Hokkaido, or at a hotel. It is funny how excited they get because they never get to watch TV! Up until now, even though they don’t watch much Japanese TV or play video games, I haven’t noticed much of a lack of cultural

knowledge. Because they have attended *hoikuen* since they were small, they get enough input about Pokemon and Yokai Watch from friends there, and what they pick up in other places. Thus far, they still seem to be in the loop with what their friends are talking about. It is only in the last month or so that M has started strongly making comments about wanting to play video games, because his friends at school talk about it more now.

In addition to the community English classes and media in the house, the visits with grandparents and other close relatives have been the other most important factor in maintaining a native-speaking level. We’ve been back to the U.S. about four times in the past few years, staying for at least three weeks each time, traveling with my parents, visiting friends’ houses, and playing with their children. In addition, their uncle has visited us two times, and came on a vacation with us to Thailand. My parents have also come two times - the last time being shortly after E was born and we had Sports Day at school. Being able to guide close relatives around their local environment in Japan in English and having to explain everything to them has definitely increased the children’s vocabulary and helped them grow. We also call U.S. relatives about once a week to talk.

Finally, because I have been a working mother throughout this entire early childhood period, we have made it a point to designate Saturday as our “family day.” On Saturday mornings, we pile in the van and drive in to Tokyo (40 mins. from home) for their activities (British Football and ballet). We make this our “English” day. We will eat lunch, and then try out a new park, or check out some other cultural event that is happening in the city.

As for their Japanese, we don’t really have to work much at it. It is the

base of their lives, in their community and at school. My hope is that for the next few years, as long as we keep up with the homework and remain actively engaged parents, we can continue to progress steadily with the foundation that we have built and the strategies we have cultivated. After these first few years of elementary school, however, after we've completed

several summer projects and the kanji input dramatically increases, I'm sure we will reach the next phase of changes, but for now—consistency, communication, and a positive attitude are key. At that point, after M and R have both completed a few years of Japanese elementary school, I'm sure I'll be ready to write my next article.

by Graham Mackenzie

In January of 2019, as H was coming to the end of her 5th year in the Japanese public elementary school system, we felt it was time to seek something that would give a significant boost to her English. H was still not very confident in using the language, and with the motivation from our Christmas visit to the UK slowly fading, the challenge of trying to make learning English relevant to her in Japan (beyond solely being able to talk to her Dad in his first language) was beginning to raise its head again. As parents, we have always thought that H would greatly benefit both from a period in a school with English as the language of instruction as well as the chance to mix with other speakers of English her own age. As to the former point, international schools in Japan are prohibitively expensive for us, and we have never been convinced that the commercial English language schools would help that much either. In regard to the latter, unfortunately, H's cousins in the UK are still toddlers, and friends of similar ages from bilingual families in Japan have Japanese as the stronger language. This means that Japanese tends to be used exclusively when they meet. A school experience in Scotland (my home country) or England (where most of my family now lives), would be ideal from a financial point of view (i.e. free!), but schools are not necessarily well set up for short-term international students and head teachers are likely to be reluctant to accept students who have below age-appropriate English language skills (McAulay, 2015).

As a result, we began to look elsewhere, and what we found was that it appears that the only English-speaking country which actively welcomes short-term international students of primary age to state schools is New Zealand. The government there encourages international students to experience state schools in the country both on a short-term or longer-term basis and has even produced a code of practice in several languages which sets out expectations for how students should be looked after by schools during their stay.

Making Arrangements

When my wife and I began researching online, we began to understand how well-established visits to New Zealand schools by international students were. Schools which put efforts into attracting international students will promote their program on their website. Having scoured those, and having considered the cost and the logistics, we decided we would be able to go for a month. I would accompany H as we felt she was still a little young for a homestay, and I will admit that I was also interested

in visiting New Zealand for the first time myself!

Once we started to show interest in different schools and started communicating with them, differences in the levels of enthusiasm became evident in the emails we received. For the most part, schools deal with agents who organize visits for large groups of students, often from Japan, China, Korea, and Thailand; but they will also happily accept individuals. Some have dedicated international student officers and ESOL support teachers and centers, and some accept students on short-term visits of as

little as a week. Others will only accept them for a full term, of which incidentally there are four, with the school year beginning in January. When it comes to choosing a school, narrowing it down to one may be quite time-consuming because of the large number which accept international students. We found it best to first select an area and initially looked at Auckland for its convenience. However, realising that school fees and accommodation were more expensive there, we finally settled on the small city of Hamilton, settled on the banks of the Waikato River, and just over 100 kilometres from Auckland International Airport.

The next consideration was the choice of the type of school (of which H could actually have joined four as an eleven-year-old): Primary (ages 5-11), Full Primary (5-13), Intermediate (10-13), Secondary (13-18), or Secondary with Intermediate (10-18). Often groups of international students join years below their own age, presumably the thinking being that this will make the adjustment to a difficult educational culture and language easier. However, for H, as an 11-year-old we felt she would benefit from the challenge of being in her age-appropriate year in an intermediate school. We decided on the particular school, Fairfield Intermediate, largely because the international student officer was so keen to accept H, and very flexible in negotiations over things like the time period. It was explained to us that H would join a homeroom class and so would experience the same lessons that a child her age in New Zealand would take. She would usually be taken out of this class for one period a day to join an ESOL class where she would work on English language skills with other international students in level-appropriate groups. Through the

international student officer, we were also able to ensure that we could avoid H being put in a homeroom class with a large group of other visiting Japanese students, and that she would have suitable provision for a medical condition that she has. The school fees for our 4-week stay were approximately 1,600 NZ dollars (around ¥120,000). Not cheap of course, but when considering the price of international education in Japan, the cost perhaps begins to seem more reasonable. This is still, a lot of money, in addition of course to the cost of flights and either accommodation or homestay fees. Finally, though, having made the investment and after a couple of months of arrangements, we were ready for our father-daughter adventure.

H's Reflection

So, what did we get out of it? Here is H's testimony:

The school was wonderful. Everyone was very kind to me; I felt very welcome. In the regular classes the teacher was very nice, and there were different ways of studying with more group work and less listening to the teacher than in Japan. In New Zealand there is more project work and we are all doing different things. The teacher gives you more individual help. The teacher doesn't explain to the whole class very much. I wanted her to write more on the board so I could write more notes and help me understand. My favourite class was maths. It was pretty easy for me, although sometimes it was difficult for me to understand the question in English. We could work on different things in groups at our own pace. In the ESOL classes we spent a lot of time talking about the different countries we were from and different culture. I showed them how to make paper cranes and do ayatori [making

string figures]. We talked a lot about ourselves, but I wanted to learn about other things too.

Apart from lessons, I have some other good memories too. I remember eating my packed lunch in a tree in the playground. That is something I could never do in Japan! Also, running barefoot in a race in PE. The best thing was I got to know more about different cultures and different worlds. I made friends from New Zealand, India, and Germany.

My English improved. My reading and writing got faster because of lots of practice. And my pronunciation is a little bit different now, because I think my voice is higher. I am a little bit more confident speaking in English as I spoke a lot with different friends, but I still don't have much confidence.

A Parent's Reflection

For me looking on as a parent, I felt the most impressive aspect of the experience was how the school was set up to make international students feel warmly welcomed, complete with a traditional Maori greeting and a send-off party. As well as this, the other children that H met in the school were very welcoming and genuinely curious about H and her life in Japan. She might not be the most outgoing of children, but H had managed to make friends by the end of the first day.

I was also impressed that she seemed to manage to keep up in regular New Zealand curriculum classes. I think that the style of education, with different groups of varying abilities working on different tasks at the same time, helped her with this. In just a month it is perhaps unrealistic to expect a dramatic advance in English level, but I did notice definite improvement in length of spoken turns and

an increased range of grammar and vocabulary in her spoken output. Most importantly, she seems more willing to communicate in English than before and this, thankfully, has continued up to now. It is of course difficult to say for sure how this has happened, but I think that making friends from around the world has helped her view English as something not only related to her own family and identity but as a tool for communication that can lead to friendships and fun. It is great to see her keeping in touch with friends she made by email and on Skype.

More than anything, though, we both simply saw this as a great experience. As I had no classes or other commitments in March, I was able to go with her, taking some of my research work with me to do during the day. We were able to find a reasonably priced Airbnb and made the most of the wonderful late summer weather by taking trips at the weekends to the beautiful east and west coasts. This of course I am sure contributed to H's positive evaluation of our trip! In short, we would both thoroughly recommend a visit as an international student in a New Zealand school, as we felt it was worthwhile from a linguistic and developmental point of view as well as just being great fun!

Note: I would be more than happy to be contacted by any readers who might be considering doing the same thing at grhmmackenzie@gmail.com

McAulay, A. (2015). Scottish Sojourns: Reflections on a Five-Year Primary Project. *Bilingual Japan* 23 (3).

