

CATESOL NEWSLETTER

SERVING TEACHERS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE



Letter from the CATESOL President

Dear CATESOL Community,

Allow me to begin my March message by expressing my sincere gratitude to each and every one of you for taking time from your very busy teaching schedules and family commitments to support CATESOL. Your willingness to volunteer- whether by presenting at conferences, serving on committees, teaching workshops, facilitating meetings, or contributing your expertise as members of the CATESOL Board of Directors- demonstrates the remarkable dedication that sustains and strengthens our organization. Your active participation across five levels, ten chapters, fifteen Interest Groups (IGs), and five committees reflects an extraordinary commitment to professional excellence and collaboration, and it is this collective effort that has helped make CATESOL one of the largest and most respected TESOL affiliates in the world. During our January Board Meeting, we approve the creation of two additional Interest Groups, Health Pathways and Citizenship, bringing the total number of Interest Groups to fifteen and further expanding opportunities for professional engagement and service.



At the upcoming 2026 TESOL Convention and Expo, to be held in (Cont.)

Contents

Letter from the President:
Gratitude for Our Community

Feature Article:
A Tribute to Nancy Frampton

Member Submissions:

Guest Author:

IG-Report:

And More

Letter from the CATESOL President - (Cont.)

2

Salt Lake City, Utah, from March 23–27, CATESOL will proudly participate as an official TESOL affiliate. On behalf of CATESOL, Margi Wald and Susan Gaer will deliver a presentation highlighting our programs, initiatives, and best practices in the field of English language teaching. Their presentation will help increase CATESOL’s visibility within the international TESOL community and further strengthen our longstanding affiliation with TESOL International Association. In addition, CATESOL will be represented at the TESOL Affiliate Booth on March 25 (11:00 AM–12:00 PM), March 26 (1:30 PM–2:30 PM), and March 27 (10:30 AM–11:30 AM). If you are attending the convention, I warmly invite you to stop by the booth to greet and connect with your CATESOL representatives.

As we continue our work in 2026, I am deeply inspired by the passion, professionalism, and generosity that define the CATESOL community. Together, we are not only supporting educators but also empowering multilingual learners and strengthening the field of English language education across California and beyond. I look forward to continuing this important work with you and to building an even stronger, more vibrant professional community in the months ahead. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to CATESOL and to the learners and educators we serve.

Words from the Editors

Kara Mac Donald and Christina Masuda

Our feature article honors a long-time CATESOL member and ELT educator whose dedication and service have made a lasting impact on colleagues and learners alike. We are grateful for the opportunity to recognize her contributions that have helped shape our organization over the years. This issue also includes several Member Submissions. These articles explore topics such as differentiated instruction and the use of immersive teaching approaches with artificial intelligence, offering practical insights for instructional contexts. In addition, our Guest Authors contribute perspectives on building empathy in the classroom and examining differences between English language teaching in the United States and Japan. In the Teacher as Learner column, readers are introduced to language learning opportunities available through the United Nations website, highlighting ways educators can continue their own learning.

As always, this issue contains many more articles and topics that we hope will inform, inspire, and connect our members. In the September issue, you met our new co-editor, Christina Masuda, and her contributions have already been a tremendous asset to the Newsletter. We are grateful for her dedication and collaboration. As the President reminds us, CATESOL is a community. Without you, our contributors, readers, and member, this Newsletter would not be the vibrant publication that it is. The Board and the Publications Committee continue to discuss how we can better meet the needs of our community, and we welcome your ideas, voices, and participation as we move forward together. It is a privilege and joy to serve the community through the Newsletter.

Feature - Tribute to a friend: Nancy Frampton - (8/20/1958 - 2/1/2026) 3

Ondine Gage with the help of Hana, Candyce, Robert Burch, Constantino Silva and Ellen Lipp

It is with a heavy heart that we remember our dear friend and colleague, Nancy Frampton, who served on the Saroyan CATESOL chapter committee in almost every capacity, and was a frequent conference presenter until she retired in 2024 due to diminished health. Nancy was a former CATESOL board member and advocate for the Community College Interest Group as she had been an ESL and linguistics instructor at Reedley College (1999-2013) and then Madera Community College (2013-2024), where she established a reading tutorial program for ESL students. Nancy was a global spirit who loved people and most especially her students, many of whom became close friends.

Nancy began her worldly adventures traveling to the Philippines as an exchange student after graduating high school in 1976. She returned to CSU Fresno to major in German. At 19, she married an international student, and in 1978-1979, they traveled to Heidelberg, Germany for her junior year, studying abroad. She returned to graduate in 1980 and began her career teaching German. Nancy gave birth to her daughter, Hana, in 1980 and spent the summer of 1981 in Beirut, Lebanon, with in-laws. Though she and her daughter's father went on to live separate lives, she continued teaching German at Fresno and Central Unified and Reedley College, when it was Kings River Community College, and enrolled in the Master's in Linguistics program at CSU Fresno in 1983. I recall her lusty laugh and sparkling eyes, reflecting, "in those days, I was Frau Frampton!" Faculty and friends remember her carrying little Hana in a kangaroo pack around the CSU Fresno campus, where she also taught for the American English Institute (AEI) and completed her Masters in Linguistics in 1985.

After Nancy graduated, she began an amazing early career teaching in Intensive English programs at the Ohio University, Athens OH (1986-1888). Then she taught summer school in Ferris State University in Big Rapids MI, and the University of Iowa from 1988-1990. She was granted a prestigious English as a Foreign Language position through Fulbright at the University of Belgrade in Yugoslavia (1990-1991), which included several consulting positions in Dubrovnik and later Lahore, Peshawar, and Islamabad, Pakistan.

In 1991, she returned to the U.S. to teach summer school at Harvard in Cambridge, MA. Later she worked for the Binational Fulbright Commission on a prestigious development program funded by the United States Agency for International Development in Cairo, Egypt. She spent five years teaching TEFL pedagogy and advanced English language courses to Egyptian university students studying to become future English teachers in the country. She collaborated closely with the Egyptian Ministry of Education and provided student teaching opportunities for her students.

At Nancy's memorial, reflecting upon her many moves as a single mother, adapting to new institutions and teaching curriculum, I recalled a conversation we had about how women of our generation, second wave feminists, were compelled to carve out careers without any concession to homelife demands. While many of us had a partner and second income to support the family, independently pursued her professional career. Because of the challenges and discrimination women faced in the workplace which demanded indelible privacy regardless of one's (Cont.)

Feature - (Cont.)

4

homelife demands, Nancy always managed her professional persona. She showed up to work polished, present, and formidable.

She returned to Fresno in 1996, which is when I met her, though coming back to the San Joaquin Valley did not make her life any easier. In fact, I remember her 4 incredibly difficult “freeway flyer years” teaching between CSU Fresno, Fresno City College, Reedley College, and College of the Sequoias. She even took a one-year position teaching between satellite campuses for West Hills Community College in Firebaugh.

However, Nancy found great solidarity and friendship in the CATESOL community, during those difficult years. We worked with colleagues, Ellen Lipp, Cheryl Chan, Susan Gear, Holly Vettori, Jonathan Boggs, and Maggy Discont on the Saryon Chapter of CATESOL committee, supporting one and another, vetting teaching ideas and curriculum, and planning conferences. As Lonna Deeter, a long-time Fresno high school ESL teacher and mentor, who first introduced us to the concept of thematic language teaching told me, CATESOL was a collective community of professionals, who supported and mentored each other’s careers through leadership opportunities. In 1999, Nancy finally landed a much coveted tenure-line position with Reedley College where she stayed until 2013. Yet Nancy never forgot the challenges of her early years. Nancy was not only an active member of the local chapter of CATESOL, where she served in almost every capacity over the years, but she also mentored graduate students in Linguistics at CSU Fresno, providing opportunities for internships and supporting their applications to adjunct teaching positions.

Nancy also took a great interest in her students at Reedley, who she learned were primarily from Michoacan, Mexico. So she submitted a sabbatical proposal and went to teach in Morelia, Mexico in 2007, where she began to learn Spanish (in her 40s), her third language. In Morelia, she met her good friend and colleague Constantino Silva, (currently Senior Director of Migrant Education). Constantino was working at the Universidad Latina de America, in Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico where he hired Nancy to teach several TESOL-related courses in the Teachers of English major. Nancy enriched the program and department with her positive energy and invaluable international teaching experience. During her time in Morelia, she collaborated with the Morelia chapter of the Mexican Association of Teachers of English, commonly known as “MEXTESOL,” as well as the US Consulate’s English as Foreign Language Department in Mexico City. For Constantino and many others in Mexico, Nancy was a joy to talk with and learn from. Among Constantino’s most prominent memories of Nancy was that despite the challenges of teaching in a new country, culture, and with a new language, Nancy’s resilience was remarkable. She endured many challenges but never let them darken her spirit because she saw the good in all people she encountered.

Nancy was assigned the task of building the ESL program at the new Madera Community College center in 2012, which was originally a satellite campus of Reedley College. Given declining support for ESL programs, Nancy expanded her expertise, changing with the times, and began training in Reading Apprenticeship and building online coursework in 2013. Transitioning into online pedagogy, she completed several levels of instructional design coursework. Again, desiring a greater understanding of her students’ communities and culture, Nancy submitted a sabbatical proposal to join the Universidad Regional del Sureste in Oaxaca , Mexico. Unfortunately, (Cont.)

Feature - (Cont.)

5

due to the pandemic, her 2021 sabbatical transitioned to online. Yet she built relationships with the university and piloted a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) class with Professor Berenice Cisneros in Oaxaca in 2024 at the time of her retirement.

At Madera Community College, which was officially established in 2020, she started the ESL tutoring center and was Director at the time of her retirement in 2024. This tribute to Nancy's work on the website demonstrates the respect for all that she began:

“Through the years, Nancy has tirelessly worked towards building a support system for both ESL tutors and ESL students. In the spring of 2024, Nancy was an integral part of planning and commissioning ESL tutor training modules that are tailored to our unique student population and their needs. All the tutors love Nancy. She's kind, loving, and wholeheartedly dedicated to her work.

Nancy's unwavering commitment to the ESL program and the success of each student and tutor is a legacy that will not fade with her retirement. Her work has helped shape the ESL tutoring program for students at MCC into a vital resource, one that continues to grow and evolve in line with the needs of the community.

Her retirement, though well-deserved, leaves a significant gap, but her spirit lives on in the work we do each day. We are forever grateful for the foundation she built and the passion she brought to everything she touched. The continued success of the program stands as a tribute to her dedication and love for her students.

As we move forward, we do so with the knowledge that Nancy's influence remains at the heart of our efforts, and we strive to honor her example of tireless devotion, kindness, and a deep commitment to the growth and success of every ESL student” ([Madera Community College, ESL Tutoring](#)).

This quote expresses Nancy's dedication to her profession, the students she served, and the spirit of the CATESOL community. In summary, I will remember Nancy, who was an ardent second wave feminist, devoted to her career as a language teacher--first German and then English as a Second and Foreign language, who never stopped growing and learning, and evolving even to acquire Spanish later in life. She faced every challenge with decorum, kindness, and compassion. These are the qualities I remember and attempt to emulate in Nancy--along with yoga and lap swimming, two activities for which Nancy was passionate and to which she introduced me. This and Nancy's famous reading of fortune cookies: After reading your fortune aloud, you must say “between the sheets”.

(Cont.)

”. Thank you, Nancy, for your gift to us all and may we continue to grace your spirit. **A scholarship has been established in her name for ESL students at Madera Community College:**

Donations in Nancy's memory can be made to:

Madera Community College, Latino Faculty and Staff Association: Nancy Frampton Memorial Scholarship elizabeth.villalobos@maderacollege.edu



“Nancy's unwavering commitment to the [Madera Community College] ESL program and the success of each student and tutor is a legacy that will not fade [...]”.

Tribute by Ondine Gage with the help of Hana, Candyce, Robert Burch, Constantino Silva and Ellen Lipp

Feature Focus- Empowering Students through Fun and Engaging Writing Activities

6

Gilda Ekhtiar, Amanda Entriiken, Bernadet Mokhatas, Jocelyn Olick, Kate Hey

As a consequence of a rapid adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, fewer language learners choose to generate their own writing. By using AI for their writing assignments, many students do not initiate their own ideas causing in-class writing to be almost an impossible task. To address the students' struggles, the English Language (EL) instructors at Modesto Junior College (MJC) brainstormed and implemented ideas to make writing more fun and engaging.

Research suggests that using AI by students to complete their writing assignments "deprives students of potential learning and intellectual growth" (Alliant International University Center for Teaching Excellence [AIU CTE], 2025). By using AI tools, students "miss the opportunity to become better thinkers and more effective writers" (AIU CTE, 2025). While the adoption of AI tools in classrooms is increasing, it may not be as beneficial for language learners who are still developing their writing skills.

Below are five writing activities that engage students in generating their own writing and empower them to become creative and independent writers. The activities are listed from the lowest to highest level of English language proficiency.

Tracing and Writing Practice Folders

by Amanda Entriiken

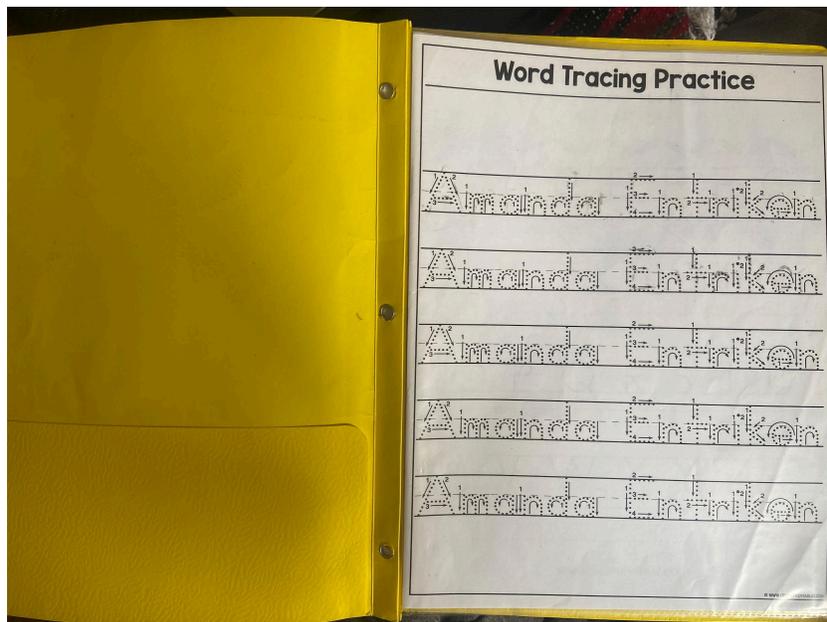
Many of the beginning students in the non credit program at MJC are attending school for the first time or are illiterate in their first language. The tracing folders are a way to help students practice writing the alphabet, their name, their country, and other essentials when they are just beginning to write.

This activity takes a lot of preparation before class begins, but once materials are ready, the instructor is able to just supervise with little need for further planning. First, I take my roster and google an editable tracing page, type in each student's name and print each sheet; I usually print three copies because I use one for the folder, I use one for an assignment in the first couple weeks of class, and then I have another copy if I need it. Then I print out a copy of the alphabet in upper and lower case letters. I also find a tracing page for the numerals 0-9. I also use the editable site to type out the country names of the places my students are from. Finally, I google a page of tracing paper that is blank and print that out. Here is a free website I like to use: [Word Tracing Worksheet Generator](#).

For each student, I get a 3 prong folder and put in 3 page protectors. In the first page protector, I put the students' names and their country back to back so that the student can see each page. Next, I put in the alphabet and number page. In the last slot, I put in the blank tracing paper. On the first day of class, I give each student their folder and a dry erase pen. I also have a folder with my name and the United States so that I can demonstrate what I want my students to do. (Cont.)

Feature Focus- (Cont.)

7



My Personal Tracing Folder

I begin each of my literacy classes with an alphabet and phonics song and then we go through the tracing folders. Many students need to practice tracing their names, countries, and the alphabet, but when there are some students that are more advanced, they can use the last blank page to practice writing their addresses, phone numbers, and other vocabulary words from class while their classmates are practicing the basics.

I have had good feedback with this activity since it does not require a high level of understanding from the students and is scalable for those with a higher level of understanding. The biggest issues I have encountered are with starting this activity (some students want to pull out the papers and write directly on them) and with students losing or forgetting the pens and materials, but I think these are lessons they need to learn to be successful in future classes. I also need to print new copies in the first couple of days because occasionally students' names are not printed correctly on the roster.

Picture Prompt Writing: Engaging ESL Students Through Visual Storytelling

by Gilda Ekhtiar

Picture Prompt Writing is a quick and effective way to engage ESL students in creative writing. Using a single image, learners develop imagination, descriptive language, and narrative skills in just 10–15 minutes.

At this year's CATESOL conference, participants explored how visuals can guide writing, build vocabulary, and support idea development. The activity is flexible, accessible, and designed (Cont.)

Feature Focus- (Cont.)

to make writing purposeful and enjoyable.

This activity works well for all levels of ESL students – from beginning to advanced – because each learner can respond at their own level using the vocabulary and structures they already know. For this activity, an instructor chooses an image that invites multiple interpretations. The collage of five sample images included here showcases the range of picture prompts. Students respond to prompts like “What is happening?” or “What happens before or after this moment?” Because the task relies on visual meaning rather than complex reading skills, it is accessible to multilingual learners, including those with limited writing experience or lower literacy levels. Dramatic scenes encourage descriptions of actions and emotions, while whimsical images spark playful, imaginative stories. Real-world photographs connect English to authentic contexts and practical communication skills.

Because visuals can be interpreted in many ways, this activity supports differentiated instruction and allows students to write at their own level. Picture Prompt Writing fosters creativity, strengthens language skills, and promotes an inclusive classroom. With just one image, students can produce countless stories, making every writing session dynamic, motivating, and meaningful.



Pictures to Inspire Writing

Feature Focus- (Cont.)

9

Daily In-Class Free Writing

by Bernadet Mokhatas

Daily Free Writing is a writing exercise where students write continuously for a set amount of time without worrying about grammar, spelling, or structure. The goal is to develop writing fluency, confidence, and creativity by allowing thoughts to flow freely onto the page.

To do this activity students need, *Daily Free Writing Journal* (provided by the teacher all in the same size and form), pen or pencil (preferred) and eraser.

Daily Free Writing has no rules. Students can write whatever comes to their minds without worrying about what is right or wrong. This writing has no pause. The teacher will set the timer for 5-10 mins (based on students' level) and students keep writing for the entire time. In this type of writing the focus is on ideas, not grammar, spelling or punctuation. Consequently, students will feel less stressed to write about their thoughts, feelings, or class-related topics.

The activity begins with the distribution of notebooks. Each student receives a 30-page notebook on the first day of class and keeps it for the entire semester. At the beginning of each class, the teacher or a student provides a new topic, question, or picture and everybody writes their response in the notebook. Then, the students form groups of four to share their ideas with each other. Afterward, each group presents a summary of the collective ideas with the class. During this stage, students have 10 minutes to agree, disagree, and engage in a whole-class discussion. At home, students read their writings aloud to identify and correct their mistakes.

At the end of semester, students will review all their entries and write a short reflective paragraph about how their writing skills have improved over time. Then, the instructor collects all notebooks and provides a low-stakes score focused on effort rather than perfection.

I have used this activity in a high-beginning integrated skills class and a low intermediate grammar course. What I have observed is that writing every day in a low-pressure environment helped my students think and write more naturally and feel less stressed about making mistakes. Moreover, self-editing helped them take ownership of their learning through reading their writing, thinking about it, identifying their mistakes, and finding a way to fix them. Students also began each class focused and ready to think critically. The combination of daily writing and class discussions helped them gain more confidence in expressing their opinions and be more open to giving and receiving feedback. By the end of the semester, students could see how their speaking, listening, grammar and writing skills had improved.

Here is some anonymous student feedback collected through the semester:

"I like free writing because I learn grammar."

"I like free writing for practice."

"I like free writing because it helps me organize my thoughts and expand my vocabulary."

"Free writing helps me write stories."

"Free writing is complicated because there are things that I don't understand." (Cont.)

Feature Focus- (Cont.)

10

"I don't like free writing because it is hard for me because I don't know how to write perfect sentences."

From this feedback, we can conclude that even the students who expressed negative feedback about free writing have basic writing skills, but they lack confidence. Thus, my intention of incorporating free writing in my class is to help these students see that they can express their thoughts clearly even if their sentences are not perfect at first.

I believe that daily free writing is more than just a writing exercise; it is a journey of growth and self-improvement. It can be a form of emotional and expressive therapy that allows the students to release all their feelings by putting their thoughts onto paper. By writing every day, students will see growth in their language skills and feel more comfortable expressing themselves in public places.

Content-Based Peer Review for Writing Classes

By Jocelyn Olick

Peer review is a collaborative activity usually occurring in the early stages of the writing process where students read, share, and discuss their writing. A content-based peer review does not look at grammar and punctuation; rather, it focuses on whether the student answered the questions the prompt asked. Editing activities can follow a content-based peer review.

Often, during peer review, instructors will hear comments like "I'm not a teacher" or "Everything looks great." But as peer review becomes a regular part of the writing process and students become comfortable with reviewing another student's writing, these comments tend to diminish. Drafting and revision become interactive and expected.

Peer review can be incorporated during the drafting step in the writing process. It is more a tool for the reviewer rather than for the student whose writing is being reviewed. The questions are structured in a way that guides the reviewer to think about if the prompt has been answered and how the writing should be structured.

This peer review is composed of four parts. Students are put into small groups and asked to follow the steps.

Step 1: Read their paper out loud without showing it to classmates.

Step 2: Switch papers. The peer reads the paper silently after just hearing it read out loud.

Step 3: Read again and follow a guided peer review.

Step 4: Talk about it!

(Cont.)

Feature Focus- (Cont.)

11

As writing teachers, we tell our students to read their papers out loud at home. However, I incorporate this activity to be done in class. When students are reading their writing out loud, they begin to self-correct and make changes as they are reading. They begin to revise their own work when they catch errors. Next, students exchange papers with their classmates. Now students are reading what they just heard. Students can mark or take notes on their partner's paper. Afterwards, students will follow a guided peer review. I create a peer review guide of about ten content-based questions that require more than a one-word answer. Regularly, I will ask students to write a sentence that they read. For example, a student might be asked what the topic sentence is and to write it out. Sometimes, what the writer thinks is clearly stated does not come across as clear to the reviewer. A question like this is designed to catch unclear and missing information. It is also common during this part of the review process that the reviewer starts to think about their own writing and will notice something they missed. I end each peer review with the question: "What did the writer do well?" This question requires the student to pick something specific that they like from the writing. Lastly, students discuss the feedback they gave. I ask them to go through and discuss each question with their partner.

An example prompt: Who is a person you admire? Why do you admire them? What are some important events in that person's life? When did they happen? Write a biographical paragraph about a person you admire. Remember to put information about the person's life in chronological (time) order. Discuss four important dates from the person's life.

The peer review that accompanies this prompt: Who is the person the writer admires? Why do they admire this person? Write the topic sentence. What is the first date you see? What happened? What is the second date you see? What happened? What is the third date you see? What happened? What is the fourth date you see? What happened? What is the concluding sentence (why does the writer want to be like the person)? What specifically did the writer do well?

There are benefits of incorporating content-based peer review as a regular part of the writing process. The activity works best with intermediate-level students but can be adapted for any level. It gives students a low-stakes activity where they will not feel like they are being critiqued by the instructor. And, it can be set up in a way to evaluate if students are meeting the criteria of an assignment. Students will be able to self-assess, rewrite, and revise their work. Ultimately, students will feel more confident about their writing!

Perspective Shift

by Kate Hey

Perspective Shift activity is suggested for higher level language learners. Here, students respond to a prompt from a book character's point of view. Students imagine and write what the story character thinks, feels, and experiences.

(Cont.)

Feature Focus- (Cont.)

There are a few steps that make this activity effective. First, an instructor chooses a character from a story or book the students have read recently. In a class discussion, students are encouraged to describe the character's background, personality, emotions and experiences based on the story. Some discussion questions might be: How would this character feel in this situation? What are his goals and/or desires? What challenges does he face? Students may need to be prompted to think how the factors from the story influence the way the character would speak or act if he had the chance.

In the next step, the instructor provides a clear writing prompt. Below are examples of two prompts I have used in my Reading Composition course recently based on the book *Giants of Science Leonardo da Vinci* by Kathleen Krull:

1. You are Leonardo da Vinci. Write a journal entry based on the last two chapters of the book we have read.
2. You are Leonardo da Vinci. Imagine it's your first day at work. What do you see, think, and feel?

Before writing, students are encouraged to brainstorm key details that they may include in their writing such as what happened recently in the story that could influence students' thoughts. This step is crucial. If there is a student in class who has not read the assigned passage, he may have a hard time completing the assignment. Reviewing the reading before writing will ensure each student is able to contribute to the writing.

During the writing, students can be given between 10-30 minutes. When doing this activity for the first time, it may take longer for the students to grasp the idea of writing from someone else's point of view. The more often the activity is done, the easier it is for the students to complete it, so 10 minutes may be enough the second or third time around. As an option, students might be encouraged to use vocabulary and grammar structures they have recently learned while being creative expressing the character's thoughts.

The last step of the Perspective Shift activity includes peer sharing. After writing, students exchange and read each other's stories. They provide feedback on how well their partner captured the character's perspective, emotions, and language. Self-reflection and discussion about the activity can also be beneficial. Here are some questions that can be asked: What was challenging about writing from someone else's perspective? Did you learn anything new about the character? How did this activity help to improve your writing skills? How did this activity help you to understand the story?

The Perspective shift activity makes a great warm-up classroom activity. It is a nice addition to a class discussion about the assigned reading passage. Students tend to enjoy it as it allows them to be creative by adding on to the characters they read about.

The activities presented above have helped EL instructors at Modesto Junior College engage their students in creating their own ideas and becoming more empowered writers. We hope that more EL instructors will also find them useful.

Feature Focus- (Cont.)

13

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Refugee Concerns-IG Coffee and Chat (RC-IG)

Register: [HERE](#)

Member Submission I - Targeted Differentiated Instruction For At-Risk Students

14

Mirna Massara and Hiba Al Ghabra

Introduction

Intensive English language programs that prepare students for high-stakes assessments such as the TOEFL present unique teaching challenges. Within an intensive three-month period, learners are expected to progress from intermediate proficiency (CEFR B1) toward upper-intermediate levels (B2) while simultaneously mastering academic test-taking strategies.

In this article, we share our experience supporting struggling English language learners in a three-month intensive TOEFL preparation program. Rather than relying on last-minute test review, we implemented a structured model of targeted differentiated instruction designed to help struggling students catch up with their cohort while continuing to progress through the curriculum.

This model included spiral review, guided listening, structured speaking practice, and tailored homework assignments. The result was substantial improvement in listening comprehension, vocabulary retention, speaking fluency, and overall student confidence.

Case Study

The program met four hours daily in the morning with a focus on TOEFL-related practice of reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. The class consisted of 14 students. By week five, and through assessments and classroom observation we identified five students who were not progressing at the expected rate. They struggled with vocabulary retention, processing listening passages, limited reading comprehension, high test anxiety, and inconsistent homework completion. These factors suggested that the students were not progressing at the expected rate and required additional targeted support to help them strengthen their skills and keep pace with the rest of the class. Over the following four weeks, these students attended daily two-hour sessions as part of the ability class, where differentiated teaching instruction focused on reinforcing foundational skills and addressing the specific areas in which they were experiencing difficulty.

Approach

First, we met the students to review their performance, discuss their weaknesses, and agree on a personalized action plan. By the end of the meeting, students agreed to attend two-hour intervention classes in the afternoon for four weeks while continuing regular morning classes. The intervention framework involved spiral vocabulary review, guided listening and reading practice, and tailored homework assignments.

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1. Spiral Vocabulary Review

Students struggled with retaining vocabulary essential for TOEFL success. We implemented contextualized vocabulary recycling using short reading passages, listening excerpts, and transcription practice.

2. Guided Listening with Strategic Scaffolding

Listening comprehension posed a major challenge for many struggling students, particularly when processing longer passages similar to those found in TOEFL. To remedy this challenge, we implemented a listening framework, which involved before, during, and after listening tasks. Before listening, students identified keywords in comprehension questions, predicted content, and reviewed common phrases. During listening, students took notes, the teacher paused the audio to clarify difficult segments and highlight unfamiliar vocabulary. After listening, students reviewed the passage with transcript support to identify missed details before completing a final listening attempt without the transcript. Over time, transcript use was gradually reduced to encourage more independent listening.

3. Strategic Reading Development

Students also struggled with TOEFL-related reading passages. Many of them tended to read word by word and focus heavily on unfamiliar vocabulary, which slowed their pace and made it difficult to grasp the overall argument of the text. As a result, they often had difficulty identifying main ideas, distinguishing supporting details, and answering inference questions. To address this challenge, students practiced skimming for main ideas and key information, identifying paragraph functions and discourse markers, and locating and identifying context clues to infer unfamiliar vocabulary. These activities helped shift learners from sentence-level processing to a more global understanding of the passages.

4. Tailored Homework Assignments

Rather than assigning the struggling students the same homework that is sent to all students, we assigned them tailored homework that targeted their particular needs. These tasks included activities such as completing short listening exercises with guided questions, practicing timed reading passages followed by short summaries, and writing brief responses that targeted specific grammar weaknesses. Homework was intentionally designed to be shorter but more focused in order to avoid overwhelming the students while still ensuring consistent improvement of their skills. Each assignment had a clear objective and was aligned with TOEFL task types. All of their tailored assignments were submitted for teacher's feedback.

Monitoring Tools

Student progress was tracked using several assessment tools throughout the intervention period. These included weekly TOEFL-style mini-tests to measure skill development and vocabulary retention quizzes. In addition, homework completion was monitored to ensure consistent and accountability with the tailored homework submission. Students also completed regular self-reflection surveys to help them evaluate their own progress and identify areas that still required improvement.

Outcomes

The intervention yielded substantial improvements in several skills. Three students moved from failing benchmark scores to a passing range, while two students improved from failing to low-intermediate performance levels. Listening comprehension showed noticeable progress (Cont.)

Member Submission I - (Cont.)

16

particularly in longer passages, and students' reading pace and vocabulary retention also improved. In addition, students reported lower levels of test anxiety and greater confidence when completing TOEFL-style tasks. By the end of the program, their overall TOEFL readiness had moved closer to the performance expectations associated with CEFR B2 level.

Limitations

Despite the positive outcomes, we faced several challenges during the implementation of this intervention plan. Some students initially perceived the additional sessions as stigmatizing, as participation could be interpreted as an indication of lower performance compared to their peers. The intervention also increased instructors' workload, as teachers were required to design differentiated materials, monitor progress closely, and provide targeted feedback in addition to their regular teaching responsibilities.

Another challenge was the potential risk of students becoming overly reliant on listening transcripts during practice if transcript-supported listening was not gradually reduced. Finally, maintaining a balance between reviewing foundational material and progressing through the regular curriculum required careful planning. However, effective teamwork, strong communication, and clear distribution of responsibilities among colleagues can help address this challenge and maintain harmony among teachers.

To help minimize potential stigma, these two hours were presented as a group that we named "Ability Class for Skill Development," which students appreciated. In addition, occasional mixed-group collaborative sessions were organized so that all students could participate in review activities and benefit from peer interaction.

Conclusion

In intensive TOEFL preparation programs, struggling students require proactive, structured intervention rather than last-minute remediation. This targeted differentiated model, which involved integrating spiral review, guided listening, and reading practice, and tailored homework, demonstrated that substantial improvement is possible within an intensive three-month period.

Although the model demands careful planning and collaboration, its impact on academic performance, skill development, and student morale makes it a worthwhile approach for intensive language programs preparing students for high-stakes proficiency tests.



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Guest Author Submission I - Building Empathy through Language Learning: Developing 21st Century Skills

17

Habib Soumahoro

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, language learning is more than grammar and vocabulary; it is a gateway to understanding other cultures, perspectives, and lived experiences. Developing empathy through language learning enables learners to communicate with sensitivity, respect differences, and navigate complex social contexts (Bennett, 2013; Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Empathy in the classroom involves more than polite conversation – it requires structured opportunities to consider diverse viewpoints, reflect on one’s assumptions, and engage in meaningful interaction. By integrating empathy-building activities, teachers create classrooms that are linguistically and socially rich, fostering learners who are both competent communicators and culturally aware citizens.

Why Empathy Matters in Language Learning

Empathy enhances:

- **Communication effectiveness** – understanding the perspective of interlocutors improves clarity and reduces misunderstandings.
- **Cultural competence** – learners engage respectfully with cultural norms, practices, and values.
- **Critical thinking** – reflecting on diverse perspectives encourages ethical reasoning and open-mindedness.
- **Social cohesion** – promotes cooperation, collaboration, and inclusive classroom environments (Kellett, 2010).

Example: Students learning Arabic analyze short stories from multiple characters’ perspectives. By discussing motivations and emotions, they gain insights into social and cultural contexts, improving both language comprehension and empathy.

Strategies for Building Empathy in Language Classrooms

1. Perspective-Taking Activities

Activities that require learners to adopt another person’s viewpoint develop cognitive empathy.

Example:

Role-plays: Students act as individuals from different cultural backgrounds navigating a shared situation, such as negotiating a contract or resolving a misunderstanding.

Debates: Learners must argue from a perspective opposite their own, practicing both language and empathetic reasoning.

Outcome: Students report higher awareness of cultural differences and improved language fluency as they negotiate meaning in context.

(Cont.)

Guest Author Submission I - (Cont.)

18

2. Storytelling and Narrative Exploration

Narratives allow learners to immerse themselves in others' experiences, fostering emotional empathy.

Example: In a French class, students read excerpts from *Le Gone du Chaâba* (Azouz Begag) and discuss the challenges of immigration and integration. Learners then write a personal reflection or diary entry from the perspective of a character.

Outcome: Empathy is developed as learners emotionally connect with characters, while language skills in reading, writing, and vocabulary expand naturally.

3. Critical Incident Reflection

Critical incidents of cultural misunderstanding or ethical dilemmas – encourage learners to analyze social situations, reflect on values, and propose solutions.

Example: In a Spanish/French classroom, students watch a short video depicting a cultural misunderstanding between tourists and locals. They identify the issue, discuss potential responses, and role-play empathetic solutions.

Outcome: Students gain practical strategies for intercultural communication, enhancing both empathy and communicative competence.

4. Collaborative and Service-Learning Projects

Projects that connect classroom learning to community engagement promote empathy through real-world experience.

Example: Students create multilingual brochures to assist recent immigrants in navigating local services. Students interview community members, practice translation, and reflect on challenges.

Reflection prompt: "How did learning about someone's experience change my perspective?"

Outcome: Learners develop emotional and social empathy, strengthen language skills, and understand the practical impact of language in society.

5. Integrating Technology and Online Collaboration

Online platforms expand empathy-building beyond the classroom.

Examples: Pen-pal exchanges, virtual debates, or collaborative projects with learners from other countries allow students to experience diverse perspectives directly.

Platforms: ePals, Flipgrid, Padlet, or Zoom-based discussions

Reflection prompt: "How did interacting with someone from a different culture challenge my assumptions?"

Outcome: Students develop cross-cultural understanding while practicing authentic language communication.

Measuring the Impact of Empathy Activities

Teachers can assess empathy development using:

(Cont.)

Guest Author Submission I - (Cont.)

19

- **Reflective journals:** Learners write about others' perspectives and their emotional reactions.
- **Peer feedback:** Students comment on collaboration and intercultural sensitivity.
- **Self-assessment checklists:** Students rate growth in understanding, openness, and communication.

Example: In a Korean language class, students' reflective journals showed a 40% increase in awareness of cultural norms after completing a three-week empathy-based project.

Conclusion and Call-to-Action

Building empathy through language learning equips students with essential 21st-century skills. Teachers are encouraged to:

1. Embed perspective-taking and role-play activities regularly.
 2. Use storytelling, narratives, and critical incidents to foster emotional connections.
 3. Implement service learning or community-based projects to connect language learning to real-life contexts.
- Leverage technology for cross-cultural collaboration.

By prioritizing empathy, language educators create classrooms that are linguistically rich, socially aware, and culturally responsive, preparing learners to communicate effectively and act compassionately in a globalized world.

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The purpose of this initial gathering is to facilitate open and collaborative discussion among educators who share a common interest in work-based learning for ESL learners. By coming together, we hope to share experiences, exchange insights, and explore ways in which we can share our stories and learn from the field. We look forward to meeting you soon! Come and meet the co-chairs and one another in polls, breakout rooms and lively discussions for those who love **Teaching English for the Workplace**.

Register: [HERE](#)

Member Submission II - Immersion for AI: Immersive Learning with Artificial Intelligence

20

Ragaa Shenouda and Onsy Shenouda

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected and multilingual world, language educators are challenged to prepare students to communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural contexts. Traditional second language (L2) instruction – often centered on discrete grammar points and vocabulary memorization – has proven insufficient for developing learners' communicative and academic proficiency. What learners require instead are sustained, meaningful opportunities to use the target language in authentic contexts. Language immersion has long provided a powerful framework for meeting this need.

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) offer new possibilities for strengthening immersion-based instruction. By expanding access to interaction, personalization, and timely feedback, AI can deepen students' engagement with the target language. This article explores how the intentional integration of AI can enhance immersive learning environments. Rather than replacing teachers, AI functions as pedagogical support, enabling educators to design richer learning experiences that foster proficiency, learner confidence, and intercultural competence.

Why Immersion Matters

Immersion places the target language at the core of instruction, requiring students to use it for authentic purposes such as collaboration, inquiry, problem-solving, and reflection. Research consistently demonstrates that immersion programs lead to higher levels of proficiency, fluency, and communicative competence compared to form-focused instructional approaches (Dubirova, 2023). Through sustained exposure and meaningful output, learners acquire language by using it – negotiating meaning, experimenting with form, and taking linguistic risks.

Beyond language development, immersion supports cognitive and academic growth. Students learn to process complex ideas in another language, transfer skills across content areas, and engage with diverse cultural perspectives. These experiences promote learner autonomy, motivation, and confidence, encouraging students to view themselves as capable and active language users rather than passive recipients of instruction.

The Teacher's Role in AI-Enhanced Immersion

Teachers remain central to the success of immersion programs, even in AI-enhanced environments. They design purposeful tasks, scaffold language development, model authentic communication, and cultivate classroom cultures where experimentation and error are viewed as essential to learning. AI does not replace this professional expertise; instead, it extends teachers' capacity to provide individualized practice and timely feedback (Wang & Huang, 2025).

Crucially, teachers determine how and when AI is used, ensuring that technology aligns with instructional goals and supports meaningful language use. Pedagogical intent remains paramount, with AI functioning as a flexible instructional tool rather than a driver of instruction.

How AI Supports Immersive Language Learning

AI enhances immersion by creating interactive and adaptive language-learning experiences (Cont.)

Member Submission II - (Cont.)

21

that extend beyond the classroom. Conversational AI tools, for example, allow students to engage in simulated real-world interactions – such as interviews, service encounters, or collaborative problem-solving – thereby increasing opportunities for authentic language use.

Personalization is a significant advantage of AI-supported learning. Tasks, prompts, and feedback can be tailored to learners' proficiency levels, providing structured support for novice learners while allowing advanced learners to engage in extended, complex discourse. This differentiation promotes equitable participation and sustained engagement across diverse learner profiles. AI also offers immediate, non-disruptive feedback that supports language development without interrupting communication. Through recasts, clarification requests, or improved language models, AI encourages accuracy while maintaining fluency (Xu et al., 2024). Additionally, AI can model pragmatic and cultural features – such as register, tone, and politeness strategies – that are often challenging to address consistently through traditional instruction alone (Wang & Huang, 2025).

Practical Classroom Applications

1. AI-Guided Role-Plays

AI-supported role-plays provide students with low-risk opportunities to practice authentic conversations. Scenarios may include job interviews, medical consultations, or customer-service interactions. AI responds dynamically to student input, encouraging spontaneous language use. Teachers observe these interactions, offer targeted feedback, and guide post-activity reflection.



AI-enhanced language learning in

2. Scenario-Based Communicative Tasks

In scenario-based tasks, students collaborate to address AI-generated challenges, such as planning an event or responding to a community issue. These activities require negotiation, information exchange, and problem-solving in the target language. While AI prompts deeper interaction, teachers scaffold language use and facilitate reflection on both communicative effectiveness and content understanding.

3. AI-Supported Pre-Debate Practice

Before participating in live classroom debates, students rehearse with AI that challenges their claims, requests clarification, and introduces counterarguments.

This practice helps learners organize ideas, strengthen evidence, and refine discourse structures. Teachers use insights from these interactions to provide focused feedback and support reflective discussion.

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Member Submission II - (Cont.)

22

Assessment and Reflection in AI-Mediated Immersion

In AI-enhanced immersion, assessment should prioritize communication, learner growth, and reflective practice rather than focusing solely on discrete accuracy. By emphasizing authentic language use, teachers can evaluate not only what students know but how they apply language skills in meaningful contexts. Clear rubrics articulate expectations for language use, interaction quality, task completion, and collaboration, providing learners with concrete benchmarks for success.

Self-assessment encourages learners to monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and set personalized goals. Peer feedback fosters collaborative reflection, multiple perspectives, and development of social and pragmatic language skills. AI tools further support assessment by tracking performance patterns, providing immediate feedback, and generating reports that help both students and teachers identify strengths and areas needing attention. Digital portfolios allow students to document and reflect on their learning over time, making evaluation an ongoing, formative process that enhances metacognition and continuous improvement. When aligned with immersive learning goals, assessment becomes an integral part of instruction, promoting engagement and reducing the perception of evaluation as punitive.

Professional Learning and Ethical Considerations

Effective AI integration requires ongoing professional development and careful pedagogical planning. Teachers need opportunities to explore AI tools, understand their potential and limitations, and learn strategies for meaningful classroom implementation. Professional organizations such as CATESOL, TESOL, and ISTE provide guidance on ethical, inclusive, and pedagogically sound technology use.

Ethical considerations are central to the responsible use of AI. Teachers must address data privacy, algorithmic bias, accessibility, and equitable access to ensure all learners benefit fairly. Establishing clear guidelines, maintaining transparency with students, and selecting tools aligned with instructional goals support responsible implementation. When combined with professional learning, ethical mindfulness allows educators to leverage AI effectively while fostering equitable and meaningful learning experiences.

Conclusion

The integration of AI into immersive language instruction offers meaningful opportunities to enhance second-language learning. Immersion provides the foundation for developing fluency, accuracy, and intercultural competence, while AI expands access to personalized, interactive, and authentic language practice. Teachers remain at the heart of this process, guiding instruction and ensuring alignment with pedagogical goals.

When immersion meets innovation, students gain richer opportunities to communicate, think critically, and engage with the world through language. Thoughtful integration of AI into immersive pedagogy holds strong potential to create dynamic, equitable, and effective language-learning environments.

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Member Submission II - (Cont.)

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Research Writers Interest Group (RW-IG) - Register [Here](#)

Judy O'Loughlin and **Jose Franco** offer a webinar on doing action research/reflective practice around Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and Multilingual Learners (MLL) students. As experts in the working and doing research with SIFEs and MLLs, they share stories and approaches to listening silence in the classroom through action research approaches. Participants will i) understand how to design a focused action research or reflective practice plan to investigate and improve instructional approaches that promote equitable engagement and learning for SIFE and MLL students, ii) apply student-centered strategies informed by reflective inquiry, including reframing silence as meaningful communication and implementing practices that strengthen belonging and voice.

Teacher as Learner: Free Trainings (in 6 Languages) Through a United Nations Website

24

Roger W. Anderson

For advanced ESL learners seeking authentic, professional language input regarding global issues, look no further than the website of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). This agency of the United Nations provides a variety of trainings on their website (www.unitar.org).

While some courses require a payment, many courses are online, self-paced, and free.

Given that the UN has six official languages (French, English, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Spanish), each of these trainings is available in all six languages.

These courses provide the user with advanced, authentic language use. For example, one training that is freely available is intended for anyone who will be speaking within a chamber of the United Nations building (e.g., General Assembly, Security Council, etc.), which will thus be simultaneously interpreted into other languages. The course, which took me less than one hour to complete, used videos followed by quizzes on the videos' content to ensure comprehension. Upon completion, I was offered a certificate (nice souvenir)! I can attest that videos of four of the six languages were nearly identical in content.

This means that a learner could enroll in the course under two different versions (e.g., Spanish and English) and move through the content simultaneously to access the same material in both Spanish and English. This may be ideal for learners who wish to check their understanding and competencies in the target language against their home/native/first language.

On the UNITAR website, just beyond (underneath) the UNITAR's full catalogue is a section entitled "Self-Paced, Open-Enrollment Events." Topics of courses range from "Green and Sustainable Chemistry" to "Lead Paint Removal," from "Sports for Climate Action" to "Women's Contributions to Fighting Corruption." Courses can be searched with filters for topic, language, etc.

These trainings are meant for real activists, policy-makers, and UN delegates. Why not bring them into the language classroom? They're FREE!

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Guest Author Submission II - An ESL Teacher's Educational Sojourn in Japan

25

Cecilia Drissia and Akira Kitagawa

In 2002 Cecilia Drissia and Akira Kitagawa met in an ESL class in Davis, California; Cecilia, as the ESL teacher, and Akira, as one of her students. The class was for parents of K-12 children, and the adult students were from Latin America and Japan. Their experiences in this class led Akira to arrange for Cecilia to spend a month in Japan interacting with Japanese students of various ages in their classrooms. Akira was able to authorize visits to a private kindergarten, an elementary school, a private junior high school, and a private college for Cecilia, her two teenage children, and a teenage friend who was studying Japanese. The benefits of this for Cecilia were a better understanding of Japanese students in her later teaching, and for Akira, more information on when and how such a crosscultural experience can benefit Japanese students.

Cecilia was motivated to learn more about the needs and expectations of Japanese students by her experience with her classes in Davis, where there was a culture clash between Asian students and Hispanic students. Her previous experience with students from Latin America, Africa, and Europe helped her meet the needs and understand the actions of her Hispanic students, but she did not have a similar knowledge and experience base for the Japanese students. She felt that her ignorance negatively affected her ability to help Asian newcomers adjust and make the most of their time in America.

The newcomers from Japan expressed discomfort with some behaviors that they observed in their classroom and in their children's classrooms. Seeing a teacher perch on the edge of a desk or hearing students challenge and interrupt the teacher during a spirited discussion, these highly educated, confident English learners were disappointed in American classroom discipline. Anxious to make the most of this opportunity of living and studying in America, they brought their questions about those classroom behaviors to Cecilia. When students from Latin America asked questions about the lessons, a Japanese student complained about the rudeness of such behavior. Cecilia was unable to understand why they thought asking questions was rude until classroom discussion brought out that in Asian cultures, asking questions is a challenge to the teacher, implying either that the teacher is wrong or that the teacher hadn't explained things properly. Cecilia felt at a loss with trying to help the Asian students understand new classroom cultures, both American and Latin American.

While he and his children were studying in Davis, Akira noticed that American education puts a strong emphasis on self-promotion and presenting one's ideas in public speaking. Starting in kindergarten, children present in a weekly "sharing day" where they speak for several minutes about their lives and interests. While Japanese people are often stereotyped as shy, it would be more correct to say they lack experience in public speaking. They have almost no opportunities for presentations in class. This develops self-confidence and makes Americans more adept at speaking in public than Japanese people.

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Guest Author Submission II - (Cont.)

26

Compared to Americans, Japanese people have few occasions to speak to strangers, especially to foreigners. Japan is a mono-cultural country and the people largely lack contact with people from other cultures or races. They feel uncomfortable around people with different faces, languages, and behaviors. Many Americans, however, have a broad experience with different people and ideas, and find it easy to share their own points of view. Japanese families whose members are well-traveled and well-educated may already have learned different cultural expectations and adjusted to behaviors that would be unacceptable in Japan, but these newcomers in Davis did not have that background and needed a crosscultural explanation that Cecelia was unable to give them.

Also, the common style of teaching English in Japan fosters their natural discomfort with making mistakes and limits their interactions in English. Exposure to English is typically limited to one or two lectures per week, and those lectures, by Japanese instructors, tend to emphasize grammar and vocabulary, rather than conversation. This leads to halting, Japanese-influenced English that is difficult to understand overseas. Most English classes in Japan are taught by Japanese teachers who themselves have had little to no opportunity to practice conversational English or to make presentations in English. Thus, the teachers are unable to give these experiences to their students. Furthermore, students are expected to memorize specific vocabulary and grammar, and to use them correctly on written tests. English is seen as a subject for school study, not a means of communication. Akira's first exposure to English was in junior high school. The first phrase he learned from his English textbook in that class was, "This is a pen." This type of English instruction resulted in "broken" or simplistic English, and students who did not understand any communicative purpose in their second language.

Continuing his education, Akira used English as a research tool, again without a real communicative purpose. As a university professor, Akira's daily exposure to English was limited to reading English-language research literature. Conversationally, he only used English at international conferences during presentations or occasionally to ask questions of presenters whose work was related to his. He has rarely had opportunities to speak English, and almost never to converse socially in English, except during his one year in California. In general, in Japan, there are almost no opportunities to speak English for any purpose.

However, during Akira's study abroad in Davis, California, he had many wonderful experiences that helped him have a new idea of how English experiences might be improved for people in Japan. After taking ESL classes in California, he began to find enjoyment in conversing in English. Cecelia patiently explained concepts to her students using various methods and approaches to ensure understanding. She gave students opportunities to speak in a controlled environment which helped them utilize their learned vocabulary and grammar for real communication.

During this time, Akira's two sons were attending elementary school classes in Davis. The family noticed many differences between classes in Japan and in Davis, and as his sons were adjusting to the culture and language in California, Akira saw that cross-cultural experiences can be beneficial to students.

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Guest Author Submission II - (Cont.)

In the classroom, Akira noticed that presentation opportunities, rare in Japanese classrooms, are frequent in the American educational system. Such presentations let them practice their speaking and listening skills with a variety of people. Also, games with their peers helped break down their timidity and focus on communication rather than correctness of language. After their American experience, both of his sons seemed to have no trouble speaking in front of people, in English and in Japanese. As he thought about this, Akira realized that most Japanese people seem to be less able to speak in public than most foreigners due to the educational system. His sons, having benefited from their time in an American school, appeared unusually outgoing for Japanese men.

Akira and Cecelia planned for a one month immersion in Japan with two main goals: for Cecelia to learn more about Japanese and Asian culture, and for students of different ages to have cross-cultural experiences that could prepare them to be more open to future opportunities as well as to using English as a medium of communication, not just a course to study in school. Because he was able to immerse Cecelia and the children in classrooms with students of various ages, Akira hoped to also determine at what ages students would be most open to and impacted by such a cross-cultural experience.

For an easy immersion into Japanese culture and life, Akira offered Cecelia and the teenagers a homestay with his family followed by an independent living experience, along with many guided cultural experiences. For the first week, the Drissias were guests in the Kitagawa family home, sleeping in the traditional way on the tatami floor of a bedroom, in bedding that was folded up and put away in the morning. The nine people (Mr. and Mrs. Kitagawa, their two sons, their daughter, Ms. Drissia, and the three teenagers) shared a single bathroom and ate together at the kitchen table. From the Japanese family, the Americans learned many Japanese skills, like recycling and to always take their shoes off when they entered a home or school. They saw many new sights, like multi-story garages with a car lift so that two cars could park in a narrow space. They were at all times included in fun family activities and delicious meals.

After that soft transition, the Drissias stayed independently in a typical Japanese apartment with traditional paper window shutters and sliding walls between the four rooms. This apartment was in a community with few, if any, foreigners, allowing the Americans to interact with Japanese people unaccustomed to foreigners in their midst. They shopped at local stores where locals seldom saw foreigners and spoke little to no English. They recycled under the watchful eye of suspicious community neighbors. They found their way around, on foot or using public transportation without Google Maps or English assistance. Both living situations gave the Drissias an incredible experience with Japanese daily life and home culture.

For Japanese civilization and cultural experiences, Akira took them sightseeing in Osaka, Kyoto, and Hiroshima, the site of Peace Osaka, the World War II museum, and memorial for the atomic bomb victims. He took Cecelia to various typical businesses, such as a private clinic specializing in gerontology for Japan's aging population. Akira arranged for three generations of experts in the art of the Japanese Tea Ceremony to teach them in a traditional tatami-mat home. The grandmother, mother, and daughter greeted them in kimonos, and gave an introduction to the history and etiquette of the tea ceremony.

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Guest Author Submission II - (Cont.)

28

This is how Japanese traditional customs are being passed on from generation to generation. The family's devotion to tradition also showed in the tiny but splendid garden at their front door, a space layered in a traditional style and filled with magnificent plants. Later, a retired high school principal whose hobby was the Japanese art of calligraphy at an exceptionally high standard showed them examples of his art, taught them the first steps of calligraphy including mixing the ink, holding the brush, and copying simple characters, and had them practice.

At the end of their visit, several of the people who had made the Drissias' visit so wonderful joined them for a final farewell dinner. They went to a special restaurant to savor sushi, a symbol of Japanese culture and one of Japan's traditional foods, now beloved overseas as a healthy and refined cuisine.

The formality of Japanese culture, so different from Cecelia's prior experiences, surprised her.

Akira arranged interactive experiences in a kindergarten, an elementary school, a middle school, and a university. These school visits were the primary focus of the trip.

The formality of Japanese culture, so different from Cecelia's prior experiences, surprised her. In each Principal's office, Cecelia was welcomed in a formal space of couches and armchairs common to Japanese officials for official conversations. At the end of each visit, she was also expected to give a formal goodbye speech to the school.

At the kindergarten, Cecelia, her son, her daughter, and her daughter's friend formally introduced themselves to the kindergarteners. Then, the children entertained them with songs and dances. Cecelia was very impressed with the kindergarteners' energy level and willingness to perform in front of strangers, showing little of the shyness typical of older Japanese people. This was the first exposure for most of the kindergarteners to foreigners with different faces, body language, and behaviors. Then they all participated in a coloring activity together. Having the young Americans join in their play was a great experience. The daughter's friend, who had come to Japan to practice her Japanese, interacted extensively with the kindergarteners in Japanese. It was good for the young people to learn that foreigners with such different faces could sometimes speak their language. The three teenagers and the kindergarteners had a wonderful cross-cultural exchange. Perhaps by sharing Japanese culture with foreigners, the kindergarteners also learned to value the beauty and uniqueness of their own culture. At the kindergarten, they also observed a swimming lesson by an excellent coach, and learned that all schools in Japan have swimming pools with professional coaches.

At an elementary school, Cecelia was again asked to do a formal introduction, after which there were some questions and presentations. She spent more than an hour in a 6th grade classroom listening to the students presenting aspects of Japan and answering their questions about the United States. She then shared a school lunch with students. She learned a lot about Japan in that short time, and when she left, it was with many souvenirs presented to her by the students that represented the various features of Japan.

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Guest Author Submission II - (Cont.)

29

In an English class of first, second, and third graders, the students had the opportunity to practice conversations in English. Each student had prepared a little speech in English. Then Cecelia asked a question of each student to clarify something they had said in their speech. This required the students to listen carefully to her and to watch her body language to figure out what she was asking them. Occasionally, she had to ask the Japanese English teacher for help. She was very impressed at how hard all the students listened in order to understand her and each other. After she had spoken to each student, they asked her questions about popular movies, music, and TV personalities, but to her embarrassment, she was mostly unable to answer these questions. Before she does this again, she would need to brush up on her knowledge of American pop culture!

On the last day at the elementary school, they also had a bit of fun. At Twilight School, an afterschool program run by the City of Nagoya, the students taught her son and her some traditional Japanese games, such as tops, paper balloons, origami, and another game in which you catch a ball in a wooden cup. This involved a lot of interaction, laughter, and learning!

In the junior high school, the students had a more in-depth experience because Cecelia's 13-year-old son spent an extended time in the classroom with Akira's son. The students also prepared a variety of English conversations to have with Cecelia in their English class. The junior high schoolers shared their culture by selecting small, typical Japanese items to explain to the visitors, such as toys, food, and items used in their daily lives.

The Americans learned to take off their shoes and put on slippers as they entered the school. They learned that all students help to clean Japanese schools. The American teen participated in all this, had lunch with the class, and listened to the teachers giving their regular lessons. During breaks, the boys gathered together to share their interests in English; a lot of it was about Manga and food!

The college students, being more academically focused, were asked to carry on a conversation with Cecelia. In seminar groups of students from two professors at the university, Cecelia tried to initiate conversations, but the students were mostly too shy. All of her questions or comments received the shortest possible responses. Later, the two teenage girls shared pictures of America with small groups (3 Japanese students to 1 American). A lot of questions and answers came out of that session. Overall, it was a wonderful experience. The hardest part for Cecelia was realizing how shy the students were to talk. She would like to try again someday, bringing with her some hands-on, intercultural activities that would encourage them to interact with her and each other.

For her classes in California, Cecelia learned that the "shyness" of Japanese people, especially when speaking English, can fade into open conversation if given scaffolding, respectful supportive experiences, and topics they are interested in. She learned aspects of Japanese history, civilization and culture that gave her more topics to include in class and helped her express respect and appreciation for them as individuals and as citizens of the country they love. Understanding that their early education contained a lot of grammar and vocabulary practiced almost only in reading and writing helped her understand their inability to comprehend her fast, American-accented streams of speech. By initially slowing her speech, providing written support for early utterances, and pausing to allow processing time, she gave them the time to adjust to the sound of her natural speech, and to connect it to the wealth of knowledge they already had.

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Guest Author Submission II - (Cont.)

30

By having increasingly complex speaking/conversational assignments, with support, they were able to gain the confidence and experience needed to come out of their shells and display their natural personalities in conversation.

Since 2003, Cecelia hasn't had many Japanese students to benefit from this knowledge, so she applies what she learned in Japan to teaching other Asian students. Although students from other Asian countries don't have the same culture as Japan, her time in Japan broadened her knowledge and helped her adapt to other new cultures.

Based on his time in the US and this experiment in Japan, Akira identified three potential points for improving English education for Japanese students. Cross-cultural education, especially interactive sessions with native English speakers, would help prepare them to interact with non-Japanese people. Practice giving presentations about not only academic topics but also personal interests and activities would prepare them to speak more confidently. Providing these opportunities starting at a very young age would access the curiosity and open-mindedness of young children. Children with these early experiences are also likely to be open to more experiences as they reach the highly self-conscious stages of middle school and university.

In this account, we can see potential benefits for both language learners and language teachers of adding cross-cultural experiences to their education. Even one short month positively affected Cecelia's teaching in the years since. The long term effects of a few hours with foreigners in the lives of these Japanese students were probably minimal, but nevertheless promising and indicative of improvements that could be made.

Acknowledgments:

We express our gratitude to Dr. M. Asayama and Mrs. S. Tujii for coordinating this event.



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Do Students Feel Valued?: Applying the Magical Equation

31

Roger W. Anderson

Classrooms are very particular spaces. And yet, classrooms are fundamentally a group of people put together for one goal: to learn a language. How strongly each student is committed to that one goal will vary. It will also ebb and flow, just as teachers' moods will ebb and flow.

To enhance students' commitment to language learning, instructors must be sensitive to students' perceptions. Are students valuing what they are learning, how they are learning it? On the contrary, teachers who are disinterested in students' perceptions, who retrench in their ideologies and practices, may fail to recognize that teaching is not (automatically) learning. Teaching is a negotiation, and learning is not always a forward march towards progress. As cliché as it has become, it remains true that good instructors "meet students where they are." They educate the learners in front of them. They do not educate the learners they *wish* (emphasis added) they had, the learners they believe they *should* (emphasis added) have.

A recent podcast episode on group dynamics forced me to stop driving and transcribe what I heard. An expert, Priya Parker, was describing the type of group that has longevity, that does not splinter and drift apart. She explained that all sustainable groups share one factor in common, one "magical equation":

"A group that has long commitment to it has two things that is true about it- (1) that every member feels like they are valuably contributing to the group, and (2) that the group feels like it is valuably contributing to the member."

The effective instructor must be an effective group leader. And therefore, instructors should always be assessing their own classrooms for these two attributes. Does every student in fact feel valued? Does the student feel like the class, their learning, is benefitting them? Answering such questions requires asking students, or at the least, requires a sensitivity to the students' perceptions.

Of course, the same "magical equation" could be utilized by instructors within their educational institution. But since learners are the reason for our jobs, our profession, let's start there.

Reference:

Klein, E. (2026, Feb. 3) Is your social life missing something? This is for you. The Ezra Klein Podcast. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/03/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-priya-parker.html>



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Guest Author Submission III - Differences between the American and Japanese Education Systems Based on My Children's Experiences

32

Akira Kitagawa

When I studied abroad at the University of California, Davis, I experienced the American education system through my three children (first grade, sixth grade, and daycare). Davis is a college-town located next to the state capital of Sacramento. I will introduce the differences between the American education system and the Japanese education system based on the experiences of my children in that town.

In Japan, when you register as a resident at the city hall of your place of residence, you will automatically receive information about entering elementary school. However, in the United States, since there is no resident registration system, each person must complete the enrollment procedures directly at the office of the elementary school near their residence. Although Davis is one of the most education-oriented cities in California, there are differences in academic ability between schools, and it is a system where parents can enroll their children in any elementary school they wish, even if it is not near their residence, if they are looking for a dedicated teacher. In addition, an American friend advised me that in the United States, parental approval is required for virtually everything, whereas in Japan, most decisions are made at the discretion of the homeroom teacher, and parental approval for individual matters is not sought as it is in the U.S. In Japan, fathers are rarely involved in giving approval.

I visited the elementary school office immediately after arriving in the United States to enroll my two sons in elementary school. However, it was closed for summer vacation. So, I mailed the names, dates of birth, current address, and contact information of my two sons to the elementary school office and waited for a response. However, I never heard back from the elementary school office.

Two days before the new semester started, the office finally opened. When I took my son there, they had just opened the documents I'd mailed. The children were interviewed immediately, submitted their vaccination reports, and completed enrollment with some simple paperwork. The next day, the class assignment chart was posted on the school bulletin board, and each classroom door listed the items needed for the following day's classes (backpack, pencil, eraser, notebook, and snacks).

First, let me share the example of my second son "H-kun". He entered first grade at age 6 (in Japan, he had been in the senior class at nursery school until July). Even though it was first grade, there was no entrance ceremony; classes started from day one.

He brought home numerous documents for us to fill out: health insurance card type and number, family doctor's name, emergency contacts, and more. We had to review every single document provided and sign them. Furthermore, parental consent was required even for the method of grading.

The weekly class newsletter was packed with upcoming event schedules and homework assignments for Monday through Thursday. Beyond homework, children were required to read a designated book daily without fail, followed by a parent's confirmation signature. These (Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

33

books were color-coded by reading level, aiming to build vocabulary appropriate to each level while fostering enjoyment of reading. Once children became accustomed to homework, weekly spelling tests on assigned vocabulary words began every Friday.

In Japan, students gather at a set time for group commuting to and from school. In America, however, students are driven by parents or school buses, or commute independently using bicycles, kickboards, roller skates, skateboards, etc. There are no restrictions on the means of transportation. However, until third grade, children must commute with a parent, and helmet use is mandatory on bicycles. Furthermore, while in Japan students carry heavy "randoseru" backpacks packed with numerous textbooks, in America they carry much lighter backpacks containing only notebooks, writing utensils, and a lunchbox. This difference stems from the fact that in Japan, textbooks are provided to each student, whereas in America, books are stored on classroom shelves for class use and occasional loan.

One month after enrollment, the first parent-teacher conference took place. The homeroom teacher stated, "It's likely we won't be able to evaluate 'H-kun's' grades the same way as other students." I felt resigned, almost giving up. When I asked about the "Pee Attention" my son was always saying, it turned out to be "Pay Attention" - "Focus on this!" Apparently, he was getting distracted during class and being told to pay attention. I also asked about the weekly Wednesday "Sharing Day" which involves sharing photos, keychains, favorite items, etc., with classmates. To share with classmates, communication is necessary. In America, they train students to give presentations in front of everyone starting in first grade. I wondered if Americans' being more expressive than Japanese people might be due to this kind of training. At that time, the homeroom teacher said, "Let's make every Wednesday H-kun's Sharing Day." As a result, my son ended up being assigned sharing duty every week. Occasionally, he forgot to prepare, or when he hesitated to present, the teacher apparently checked his backpack. Because of this, every Saturday, Sunday, and holiday, we went out as a family with our camera, also searching for topics for Sharing Day. Tuesday nights brought extra homework for us parents: writing English compositions for "Sharing Day." Yet for our family, this became a way to create many shared memories during our time in America, and later we thanked the homeroom teacher.

From the start of school, H-kun struggled. He wouldn't speak clearly, just muttering things like, "They touch my body," "They're mean to me," "They copy me." "They wrap ropes around my body." With no Japanese classmates or Japanese speakers in his first-grade class, his inability to communicate in Japanese led us to worry about 'isolation,' even "bullying". I emailed the homeroom teacher about the situation. In Japan, this would likely be seen as a problem, and the bullies would probably be reprimanded. However, the homeroom teacher's unexpected reply was: "No problem!" "No need to worry!" "Let's observe a little longer!" A few days later, just as the teacher had said, there seemed to be no problem at all. He found common ground with his classmates through Japanese anime like "Pokémon," "Digimon," and "Dragon Ball." It seems that even with a language barrier, finding shared interests allows communication. The actions H-kun felt as bullying seemed to be appeals to be friends. Presumably, the classmates were interested in my son, but due to communication barriers, they expressed it through physical contact. (Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

34

Once they managed to communicate somehow, those apparent bullies became close friends, even going so far as to visit each other's homes. This transformation took about two weeks. Around this time, my son started enjoying school more.

The initial alphabet lessons were also unique, as they taught Animal Phonics (expressing the alphabet with body movements while pronouncing the sounds). Furthermore, through daily reading practice, noticeable changes began to appear day by day. H-kun was able to pronounce words the first time he saw them, although he did not understand their meanings. In class, he practiced writing words with similar pronunciations, preparing for the Friday spelling test. At first, he could only catch about 20-30% of the teacher's pronunciation. But about a month after enrollment, a turning point arrived. The catalyst was the arrival of a Japanese classmate who had moved to San Diego about two years prior. Initially, thanks to the homeroom teacher's arrangement, H-kun sat next to him and received translation help. However, this backfired: they chatted in Japanese too much during class, frequently getting scolded by the teacher, and during breaks, when they formed a group with only Japanese students, other classmates found it hard to approach them. They thought, "We're having fun together as Japanese people, so isn't that fine?" But just before Christmas, his parents requested the homeroom teacher to separate him from H-kun.. The teacher, unsure how to respond, emailed me asking for my consent. While we wanted to let things be, we were also concerned that, despite living in America, our interactions were recently limited to Japanese people, reducing English communication. So, we left everything up to the homeroom teacher. Since we hadn't told H-kun about this, he was surprised when the seating changed the next day. He also seemed to have convinced himself he wasn't allowed to use Japanese at school. Furthermore, our younger son developed a competitive spirit towards his Japanese classmate, becoming more active in spelling tests and making friends. As a result, by about six months after starting school, H-kun could understand the homeroom teacher's pronunciation and started bringing home perfect scores on spelling tests.

Lunch at the elementary school was also memorable. Instead of a Japanese-style school lunch, students either brought a bento box or chose from a salad bar or hot lunch options in the cafeteria. To avoid crowding, lunch times were staggered by grade level. Parents could also eat lunch there if they applied in advance, so we decided to give it a try. For about \$2, you could choose from two or three types of bread, salad, and a drink (milk, chocolate milk, strawberry milk, etc.) on a recyclable tray made from apple peel. It was inexpensive, delicious, and satisfying enough to fill an adult's hunger.

In California, it hardly ever rains outside of the rainy season (November). Because of this, during lunch, H-kun and his classmates would sit on benches beside the playground and happily eat together. This kind of scene is one you often see in movies. During breaks, children always had to go outside, playing ball games like soccer and basketball or using the playground equipment. Meanwhile, volunteer fathers would blow whistles to caution children with poor manners or keep watch to prevent trouble. However, Japanese elementary school playgrounds don't have volunteer fathers stationed there.

(Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

35

Among the many events, the following ones remain memorable: The Back to School Night orientation held from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM, the Halloween Festival with a costume parade on campus, Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King, Junior Day, the Book Fair selling books day and night, the Christmas Song Festival, New Year's and Chinese New Year celebrations, Valentine's Day, and Easter. The principal participated in every single one of these events.

Additionally, the 100-day celebration after enrollment doubled as a math lesson. The teacher instructed us, "Collect 100 of anything and bring them to school." My second son prepared 100 origami cranes. Some children brought 100 pieces of dog food, buttons, gummy candies, coins, or beans. During this lesson, they shared with classmates and later exchanged items. Volunteer mothers supported these various events. Japanese elementary schools do not ask for volunteer mother support.

Often, when there were birthday parties, mothers would bake cakes or cookies to bring, so their presence was frequently seen in the classroom. Field trips also occurred several times a year, with volunteer parents driving the children to places like movie theaters, art galleries, and museums. Before Halloween, the class went to the Pumpkin Patch together, with support of volunteer parent drivers, and purchased pumpkins. Calling on so many parent volunteers ensured that parents were always involved with the school.

In Japan, large buses are chartered for field trips and school trips, almost exclusively for upper grades, and parents have little involvement with these or any aspects of the school.

Meanwhile, my eldest son, T-kun, was 12 years old. In Japan, he would have been in sixth grade until summer break, and locally he was old enough to enter seventh grade (first year of junior high). However, because he couldn't speak English, he entered sixth grade. My initial assumption that he would easily handle the classes proved wrong almost immediately. He couldn't understand a word the teachers or classmates were saying. Even when his classmates cheered, "No homework today!", he had no idea what they were celebrating. Furthermore, T-kun would diligently copy the homework written on the whiteboard every morning, but he often struggled because the assignments were illegible due to spelling mistakes or words not broken into syllables.

I had also heard it said that Japanese math progresses faster than in foreign countries, like America. All of that was completely shattered. In America, it seemed like they taught the same things over and over again from fourth to sixth grade. Looking at just parts of it, Japanese math progression might seem superior, but overall, the Japanese level felt comparable to America's. However, the American system allowed high-achieving students to advance faster, while Japan's system kept everyone progressing at the same pace, even top students. It felt like standing out gets punished in Japan. Math classes started with a test, and students were grouped by ability. T-kun could solve problems if the equations were written out, but he struggled to tackle questions because they were in English. Consequently, he was placed in the intermediate class. His biggest problem was the lack of communication, which was a much more serious issue than for my younger son. Like his younger brother, T-kun had no Japanese classmates or Japanese speakers in his sixth-grade (Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

36

class. He seemed to feel considerable stress, unlike anything he had experienced before, and grew frustrated with his inability to communicate.

At the first parent-teacher conference, the homeroom teacher, concerned about T-kun's daily behavior, suggested purchasing an electronic dictionary with a pronunciation function to handle Japanese-English translation. Thanks to this dictionary, he gradually began to communicate with his classmates. Around that time, I received an unexpected email from the homeroom teacher: "Is 'T-kun' feeling stressed by this electronic dictionary? If 'T-kun' is feeling stressed, we need to consider another approach." In Japan, I doubt they would ask things like, "Has the electronic dictionary helped him communicate?" or "It's great he can communicate now, isn't it?" I felt the difference in sensibilities between Americans and Japanese, while also appreciating how genuinely concerned she was about T-kun. However, this joy was short-lived as a social studies project began. For this project, students had to choose a topic based on a given theme, research it using library books and the internet, compile their findings on a poster board, and give a presentation. The first theme was "Mesopotamian Civilization." This became our homework, not just my son's. We researched cuneiform writing, agriculture, and more. Because of this, during lunch, we would sit on benches beside the playground and happily eat with our classmates, gathering photos and other materials from books and websites to paste onto the poster board. We also managed to finish a draft for the presentation. Later, with the help of an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher who edited the manuscript, we managed to get through the presentation. These presentations start in fourth grade, and by sixth grade, the classmates were quite accustomed to them and handled them well. However, this was the first attempt for both T-kun and us, and the timeframe for creating the project manuscript was short, only about one to two weeks, so we struggled quite a bit. About two months later, the theme for the next project was "Egyptian Civilization." For this project, we researched architecture, astronomy, and hieroglyphics, and submitted a model of the leveling instrument used in pyramid construction. This time, my younger son also participated, and we created the project as a family.

Without a moment to catch his breath, the next assignment was a theme about figures who contributed to the world. However, for T-kun, who rarely read books, this was quite a challenge. He struggled immensely just to read the assigned pages of the book every day without fail. Finding someone world-renowned proved even harder. While agonizing over alphabetically listed titles at the library, he serendipitously discovered a book about "Mother Teresa," a figure he'd learned about in Japanese elementary school. He compiled a report covering her life story and achievements. Then, donning a "Mother Teresa" costume made by my wife, he took the stage to present as her. All the time and effort spent researching paid off, earning him considerable praise from both the teacher and classmates. For T-kun, who had previously struggled with communication and was quite shy, this became a turning point. He even started to be well-liked by his classmates.

When T-kun was pulled out of regular classes several times a week to attend ELS classes (special classes for Japanese and Chinese students; learning English through English), his class- (Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

37

mates would take notes for him in his regular classes. One unique class was Health (sex education). The Health exam required retakes until a passing score was achieved. I was told that failure meant not advancing to 7th grade. In other words, it was considered so important that failing meant not graduating elementary school. The 6th graders learned extensively about the physical differences between males and females, covering menstruation, contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare. Furthermore, using sacks of flour, they created "flour babies" by naming them, recording their birth weight and birthplace, building cribs from boxes, drawing faces on them, and decorating them with clothes. After that, they had to carry their flour babies everywhere – to the bathroom, bath, during class transitions, commuting to and from school – and keep detailed childcare diaries for about two weeks. The childcare diary content was realistic, including weight changes, meals, stool and urine conditions, body temperature, and more. This was done not only by female students but also by male students. This was a practical application of the health education lessons.

Sixth graders, like first graders, received help from volunteer parent drivers. At the start of sixth grade, they stayed at an outdoor education camp named Walker Creek for 4-5 days in a group living facility, receiving instruction from dedicated staff. They also had numerous opportunities throughout the year to leave the classroom for field trips. However, even within the same school and grade level, not all classes followed identical lesson plans, field trips, or events. These were planned and implemented separately by each homeroom teacher, with full responsibility resting with them.

When attending such events, it was mandatory to submit documents including parental consent forms, insurance card type and number, family doctor's name, and emergency contact information. Day in and day out, it was a constant cycle of parents signing consent forms for their children's paperwork.

T-kun's class was particularly active among the sixth-grade classes. They often gathered at school at 5:00 AM, drove three hours on the freeway to a museum to view exhibits, then immediately returned to the classroom to discuss their museum experience. Among the many field trips we took, the most memorable was Space Camp. Since I was about to return to Japan, I participated as a volunteer driver for the field trip. When I heard "Space Camp," I imagined "NASA," "space shuttles," "moon rocks," and "lots of photos and exhibits." However, the place we arrived at looked like just a regular building on the outside, contrary to my expectations. Still, I entered with some anticipation. The first room we gathered in had a ceiling modeled after space, but it felt more like a science museum than a space shuttle. After receiving an explanation of the facility, the students were divided into groups like the Communication Team, Probe Team, and Medical Team, with assigned roles. Then, following the signal from the officer in charge and using the prepared manual, communication began as a simulated exercise between the Space Shuttle and the ground Control Tower. Though seemingly just a room, a large screen displayed various information. Messages were input into the computer, output, and transmitted. The Probe (Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

38

Team connected wiring and assembled units to send video from the space shuttle to the ground control tower. T-kun was assigned to the Probe Team, the only group without a manual. I watched T-kun's movements intently, filled with anxiety. Through a series of operations involving reading, writing, and transmission, the comprehensive exercise for the regular lessons was completed. This simulation exercise served as a thorough review of the entire six years of elementary school while also providing an internship experience; it was a very well-designed system. Additionally, besides field trips, pizza parties were held numerous times in the classroom at the end of the semester, costing only about \$2 per person.

During this time, T-kun was also a sixth grader at the Japanese Supplementary School (Port of Sacramento), which borrowed space at California State University, Sacramento, only on Saturday mornings. At the Japanese supplementary school, he received instruction in Japanese from Japanese teachers for subjects like Japanese language, math, science, and social studies. Even within the United States, it had aspects that felt more Japanese than Japan itself. Due to the time constraints of only four hours per week, a considerable amount of homework was assigned. In addition, T-kun belonged to a soccer team in Davis from September to November and a basketball team in Davis from January to March, so he was very busy with many handouts because he missed classes for games. League games were held almost every Saturday morning, so I traveled back and forth between the supplementary school and the stadium many times a day. He joined the soccer team not because he wanted to, but because a Canadian friend he met in Davis needed one more player and kind of forced him to join. At first, he had trouble communicating, but he gradually learned to communicate with his teammates through sports and seemed to start enjoying himself. After the soccer season ended in November, he joined the basketball team on his own in January. He was amazed by the jumping power and technique of American elementary school students, and the level of basketball, but he enjoyed playing with everyone. Looking around the streets of Davis, it seemed that basketball is so popular that every house in America has a basketball hoop in the yard.

Finally, I'll share the experience of my daughter N-chan, who was four years old and attending preschool (equivalent to a middle level kindergarten class in Japan) in a program on the elementary school grounds. My daughter started attending the preschool where the only daughter of a Taiwanese-American friend who lived in the same apartment complex went. They were in the same class. From Monday to Friday, the hours were from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM. On Tuesdays, she also attended music class, so the hours were from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM. After arriving, they immediately played on the playground equipment in the courtyard, and around 9:30 AM, study time began. The activities included a sharing time similar to elementary school. When it was their turn, children would bring their favorite book, and the teacher would read it aloud to the class. They also wrote classmates' names on paper, helping them learn names while practicing the alphabet. Other activities included coloring and collage work.

N-chan had no Japanese classmates or Japanese speakers in her class, making communication in Japanese impossible. My work responsibilities led me to pick her up late once, causing (Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

39

her Mexican teacher to provide one-on-one care. This incident significantly narrowed the distance between her and the teacher. The penalty for my forgetfulness was far from cheap – \$25 per instance – and I paid it three times. However, this violation later became money well spent. She didn't become fluent in English, but she seemed to be teaching Japanese to her classmates. As a result, both the teacher and classmates had somehow learned basic Japanese greetings. So, in N-chan's case, even though she couldn't speak English, she was happily communicating with her classmates.

Just before returning to Japan, the daycare teacher asked my wife, "Please come teach 'origami'." It seemed that this teacher (an Indian) assumed all Japanese people could do origami. The classmates appeared interested in origami, but couldn't fold it well themselves, so they all gathered around my wife asking her to fold for them. She ended up folding many cranes, frogs, and other figures. At that moment, the homeroom teacher instructed, "N-chan, please distribute these folded origami to everyone!" Of course, the instruction was given in English, but our eldest daughter immediately started moving. My wife was surprised and asked the homeroom teacher about it. The reply was, "N-chan understands what the teacher and classmates are saying." It was an unexpected answer. After hearing that story, I looked at our daughter, and she had a very satisfied look on her face. In just eight months, she had somehow managed to become able to understand spoken English. As our return to Japan approached, my daughter begged me to invite her close friend to our house. She played happily with her friend using toys. After that, she began going back and forth between her friend's house and ours.

I realized that the younger the age, the greater the ability to find common ground and adapt. These are just some of the experiences my children had, but in the American education system in Davis, I felt a sense of unity between parents and teachers. In Japan, I hardly know what my children are doing now. However, in the United States, I felt involved and even compelled to participate in everything, such as taking them to and from school and reading and signing all the documents from the school, so I was kept informed of what was happening at school. During this time in Davis, I saw a significant difference between the relationship of parents and children in Japan, where fathers are focused on work and leave everything to mothers and cram schools, and the relationship of parents and children in the United States. In the United States, the relationship between parents and children involves not only mothers but also fathers. This involvement with the school was somewhat compulsory, building a stronger parent-child relationship. The education system in Davis emphasized the importance of the individual, encouraging them to develop skills from elementary school that would help them choose their future career. As part of that, they seemed to focus on the California standardized tests, which begin in the second grade.

The reason we were able to live comfortably during our first time in America was because of the attentive support we received from the principal and teachers. We thought that all schools in America would provide the same kind of attentive support. However, we heard about other Japanese children attending other elementary schools, who were told, "If you don't understand English, it's okay to do what you like," so they didn't participate in class and read Japan- (Cont.)

Guest Author Submission III - (Cont.)

40

ese books instead, and their homework was only done halfway. The policies differed considerably depending on the homeroom teacher, rather than the school.

When our return to Japan was scheduled, my children were very disappointed; they had become so accustomed to life in the United States that they wanted me to return to Japan alone. It was only an eight-month stay, but I was amazed at how well my children adapted.

Though I went abroad without any prior information, I cannot help but be grateful for the many friends I made, the elementary school near our home, and the incredibly dedicated homeroom teachers.

Finally, I intend to incorporate the numerous insights gained through my children's exposure to the American education system – particularly the importance of presentations – into my future university lectures.



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